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THE BIZARRE, THE FRIGHTENING, THE GRUESOME



**THE NAMELESS
OFFSPRING**

by CLARK ASHTON SMITH

●
**THE BRIDE
WELL**

A Tale From
Cornwall

by DAVID H. KELLER, M.D.

●
**CAMERA
OBSCURA**

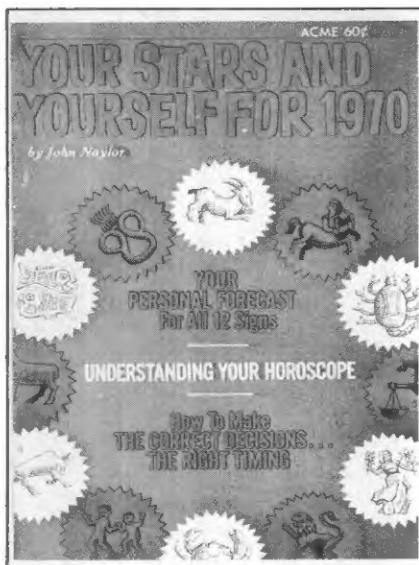
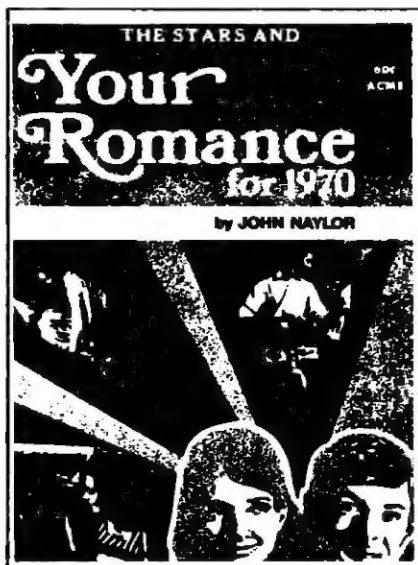
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THE BIZARRE, THE FRIGHTENING, THE GRUESOME

Volume 6

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Robert A. W. Lowndes, *Editor*

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The Editor's Page

Back in 1945, I took a night course at NYU in writing, under the aegis of Professor William Mowry, more out of curiosity as to whether such courses had anything to offer than for other reasons. I do not now recall very much about it, but it was worth the \$25 that was charged then for one sentence that the late Prof. Mowry said toward the end of the course. And when you come to think of it, almost any educating experience that is lastingly effective can be reduced to a sentence or two. The misleading thing about this is that the summary alone, without the session-to-session lead-up will be of little value to most people. However, it can be of value to those who have had background experience but did not come to this distillation, either by themselves or through having someone summarize for them.

The golden sentence was this: "A story is a marshalling and mastering of emotions not a marshalling and mastering of facts."

Hardly a week passes but that I read either a manuscript or a published story — and not infrequently, in the latter instance, one by a well-known name — where it is clear that the author has not grasped this essential distinction; or that the author has a vague idea along these lines but is lacking a sense of proportion.

The difference is the difference between fiction and journalism, for journalism is a marshalling and mastering of facts. However, this does not mean that fiction needs no facts or that it is possible to write good journalism without a trace of emotion. Prof. Mowry

neither said nor implied that a story should be all emotion or that journalism should be nothing but machine-made facts.

Our potentialities for action in any situation are limited and conditioned to a large degree upon what facts we have in our consciousness at the time. But what we do about the situation depends upon emotion — how we feel about the facts. And the "facts", please note, may be either correct or incorrect; they may correspond to the actualities outside our nervous systems, or they may be information in our consciousness which we consider to be factual, but is not. Misinterpreted or erroneous facts are often no less important than correct ones, so far as the potentialities are concerned.

Strictly speaking, your emotions and other things that go on within your nervous system are facts about you, just as what goes on inside me are facts about me — but the distinction is not useful here; it is more useful to see the two elements as separate in writing a story, at first. The creative process will then blend the facts and emotions in a way that is unique to you and no one else, although the imitative writer's uniqueness will not be of high enough an order to make it of much value — except, perhaps, to the reader who is not familiar with the material or the authors from whom the imitative writer is cribbing.

In the mid-30's, the leading fan magazine of the day, *FANTASY MAGAZINE* presented a fascinating novelty in its third anniversary issue: two stories bearing the same title, *The Challenge From Beyond*, each written in

round-robin fashion. One was by a group of science fiction authors, and I do not now remember who they were; the other was by a group of weird/fantasy fiction authors: C. L. Moore, A. Merritt, Robert E. Howard, Frank Belknap Long, and H. P. Lovecraft. I did not see this story at the time, but a few years later, Donald A. Wollheim loaned me a copy and, after I had read it, asked me if I derived the same impression he had: that the writing in the fantasy version was uniformly better than the writing in the science fiction version. I agreed without cavil. And this led to a discussion, the conclusion of which was that, in general, most of the best-loved weird/fantasy stories seem to be much better written than the most popular science fiction tales.

It was rather disturbing, because we were both loyal science fictionists, and I, at least, was distressed to become aware that, on the whole, weird tale writers were better craftsmen than science fiction writers. We were not considering the great classics; we were considering the contents of our favorite magazines, eliminating any reprints from the masters, such as H. G. Wells in science fiction.

And the problem this raised is one that still disturbs today's science fictionists, both readers and professional authors. Science fiction writing in magazines has, indeed, improved since the '30s - but current concern with characterization, motivation, and all the other elements which we distill when we analyse fiction shows that both readers and writers are aware that all is not so well with science fiction writing in general as they feel it ought to be. For now, just as then, there is a large body of opinion and feeling that science fiction ought to be as well written, in every aspect, as conventional fiction or weird/fantasy fiction.

STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES

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issue, Summer 1970*

THE SMELL

by Francis Flagg

* * *

THE TEMPLE OF DEATH

*a Taine of San
Francisco Novelet*

by David H. Keller, M.D.

* * *

THE MAN WHO COLLECTED EYES

a new story

by Eddy C. Bertin

* * *

THE DEVIL'S ROSARY

a Jules de Grandin novelet

by Seabury Quinn

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WEIRD TERROR TALES

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1970 issue (No. 2)*

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an eerie Novelt

by
Sewell Peaselee Wright

THE SHADOW ON THE SKY

by August Derleth

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a New Story

by Dick Donley

THE WEB OF LIVING DEATH

a bizarre novelet

by Seabury Quinn

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see page 121*

Professor Mowry's summary suggests what is wrong, but the very suggestion raises a distressing problem. Science fiction, by definition (even though no single definition has yet been found that is satisfactory to everyone) has to be more concerned with facts than other types of fiction. It has to start with: "Given such and such (presently) established facts, what can be logically extrapolated from them?" In a sense, this is as confining as the puzzle-type murder mystery, wherein the author must start with the solution to a (hopefully) baffling mystery.

There is no limit as to how well the author can write a story, as to what insights into the human condition in general, and his characters in particular may be embedded. On the surface both types of fiction present severe limitations, but the best authors (such as H. G. Wells, in science fiction short stories and some of the novels, and Agatha Christie, in murder mysteries) have managed to transcend these limitations to an impressive degree, without slighting the rules of the game. But more often than not, the marshalling and mastering of facts necessary to present good science fiction, or a baffling murder mystery which nonetheless presents a fair chance to the reader to solve the puzzle before all is explained, has crippled the story so far as literary value is concerned.

I have just re-read *Venus Equilateral*, by George O. Smith. Even though not technically minded, I find his extrapolations fascinating. He has managed to put them in to interesting plots, with characters and characterization which work well enough so that the stories do not seem utterly absurd. The experience is enjoyable, and George has, for my money, succeeded in doing what he set out to do: write entertaining stories that stimulate

anyone who has even a slight interest in technological extrapolations and speculation on what might happen *if...* He knows as well as I do that *Venus Equilateral* has no literary depth, and I doubt that he considers himself a great writer so far as notable mastery of the language is concerned. Neither of these elements are necessary for the purpose of intellectual entertainment of this sort.

Problems arise when a science fictionist considers the matter of producing science fiction which has both literary depth and mastery of language, without losing the backbone of scientific extrapolation. Today we see a larger percentage of stories which, if not enduring masterpieces, are admirable as examples of story writing, and some of these are acclaimed as triumphant solutions of the problem. Most of them are not; they have little scientific backbone, or none at all; as science fiction, they are jellyfish — albeit very fine jellyfish, in their own right.

Generally speaking, the talents which are required to produce first class fiction, and the talents required to learn and master one or more of the sciences, as well as the art of scientific thinking, are vastly different. I do not mean that you never find them all in the same person, but that it is relatively rare. Imagination, discipline, and insight are required both for the scientist and the author; but more often than not, the scientist and the author have different sorts of imagination, different modes of discipline, different kinds of insight. There are and have been first class scientists who have written good to excellent science fiction (Eric Temple Bell — John Taine — was an example in the old days; Isaac Asimov is an example today), but with most persons who have written or who write science fiction, one aspect is developed at the expense of the other.

THRILLING WESTERN MAGAZINE

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We do not have this problem, almost schizoid in some respects, when we come to weird/fantasy fiction, for the basis of this literature is solidly that of emotion in the first place. (This is not to imply that a good story has to be, or even should be, noticeably *emotional*!)

Weird/fantasy fiction is rooted in fears and desires and dreams, wonders; and the inexorable facts of acutality — so far as what is (or seems to be) scientifically possible — are secondary. The highest practitioners of the art have mastered the particular logic and discipline that each story written requires, so that the great fantasies are as thoroughly worked out as great music; and the question is not the particular limitations that the author has selected (or which his psyche has selected for him) but rather how meaningfully he has worked within these limitations. (No musically understanding person finds fault with Handel's *Messiah* on the grounds that it does not develop symphonically, nor again finds fault with Bruckner's symphonies on the grounds that they are not constructed like Haydn's, Mozart's, or Beethoven's.)* Those who have objected to *The Lords of the Ring*, on the grounds of Tolkien's avoidances may be stating perfectly valid reasons for their personal lack of enjoyment; this is legitimate, so far as it goes, but does not constitute competent criticism of what the author *has* done.

Science fiction, then, must be far more concerned with facts and the scientific consideration of them, than any other type of fiction except for puzzle-type murder mysteries — unless, as is all too possible — the term "science fiction" is to become entirely

* The noted critic Hanslick excoriated Bruckner on just these grounds; his articles show that he could both see and hear what Bruckner was doing. They also show his deficiency in understanding; this was not bad *ipso facto*.

meaningless. There is, of course, a branch of science fiction wherein the difficulty can be reduced to a minimum: the story which is, indeed a marshalling and mastering of emotions which could not have arisen without certain scientific phenomena not presently considered possible, or probable, or within the range of anything like immediate technology. William Sloane's *To Walk The Night*, is a fine example. More and equally excellent material of this sort (by which I do not mean more stories with Sloane's plot, etc.) will certainly help give science fiction standing, as well as attract persons who would not be attracted by the other type.

But it is that other type of science fiction, the sort which is preponderantly concerned with phenomena, which aroused the sense of wonder in me and in countless others back in the late '20s and early '30s. That was what I purchased those old magazines for, in the first place. Even when I was attending high school, I could tell that H. G. Wells was a better writer than Otto Willi Gail, but *The Shot Into Infinity* was tremendously exciting as well as scientifically responsible for its time. And while my ignorance of science left me helpless before the absurdities of John Russell Fearn, whose tales were thrilling, I could see that he could not compare in literary excellence with Lowcraft, Clark Ashton Smith, or C. L. Moore.

"Hard science" science fiction, then, is the most difficult; "phenomena" science fiction (wherein the science may or may not be acceptable, even at the time of writing) is less so. Insofar as scientific reliability goes, John W. Campbell had an interesting comment to make, back in 1933, in the letter section of the May *AMAZING STORIES*, acknowledging certain defects in his Arcot-Wade-Morey series:

"... An author's duty is to amuse, and to suggest interesting or new ideas. If my stories have done that, they were good stories, and why not overlook an occasional slip? As all readers of the magazine must realize, every story written has some fallacy, and in every case the author strives to divert attention from the fallacy, as the magician attempts to divert the audience from his operations. The magician cannot actually perform what he seems to achieve; no more can the author actually explain what he seems to explain, and describe. But the magician's tricks are interesting as tricks, more so because the fault is there — and the audience knows it. I haven't written a story yet that didn't have some fault, but many of them have not been brought to light. The fault must be there, for I am describing a machine or process of tremendous commercial value. If the thing could be accomplished as I say, would I not have patented it?"

This is not an apology for carelessness or ignorance, but a realistic appraisal of just how "scientific" really interesting science fiction can be; it does not leave a valid excuse for the author who decides that anything can go, because this is science fiction. To a certain extent, even the best of science fiction must be magician's tricks, diverting the reader (at least momentarily) from what the author well knows is impossible, or not possible on the terms he is stating.

To a certain extent, all highly imaginative fiction, such as weird/fantasy or science fiction, has to be magician's tricks. It deals with that which never was, which is not now, and which most likely may never be — or which the author or general reader is convinced never was, isn't, and never can be. But this sort of thing is the content of a large part of the inner life of almost anyone. I do not mean that almost anyone dreams of contra-gravity ships or

hyperspace or vampires, etc., but rather that a large percentage of our inner desires and dreams have somewhat less possibility of actual realization than setting up a colony on the surface of Jupiter during the twentieth century.

No, most of these things about which most persons dream and imagine or scriptwrite are very ordinary and mundane matters; but the dreamer is usually unaware of the fact that he is doing the same thing in his own way that the author of weird/fantasy or science fiction is doing in another way. To say that all fiction of any sort is escape literature, and that all authors use magician's tricks, is to state truth about fiction — but it doesn't help us much with our particular considerations and problems in producing excellent stories, any more than to state the universal fact of human mortality helps in considering whether this particular person is likely to die right now.

Here, then, we see part of what is wrong with the ultra "realistic" or naturalistic approach to fiction, the story which does nothing but present facts as a reliable newspaper ought to do, the slice-of-life story, etc. The journalist is confined to the facts as well as he can uncover and present them. He tries to put them in order even as he sets forth to tell it as it is — but *as it is*, actuality gives the impression of disorder more often than not.

The marshalling and mastering in fiction should be of a different nature, a painting, not a photograph. Where the journalist reports what a person actually said under certain conditions, the fiction writer can present what the person should have said. The incoherent thoughts of the heart can be expressed in fiction where they are not expressed in journalism, but lie there, under ice, for (possibly) an astute psychotherapist or psychologist to root out. The sometimes bleeding chunk of life, which appears to have no beginning and no ending, can be given a beginning and an end; that which in actuality seems senseless, illogical, irrational, can be made to appear rational. Order can be brought out of chaos; the unseen become seen.

When this is poorly done, we call it contrived; yet all fiction must be contrived — but when it is well done, the author has diverted our attention from his mechanics, even as the skillful stage magician diverts us from his operations. Thus we can arrive at enduring literature — enduring not only in the sense that others may be reading it for the first time after we have gone our way, but that we ourselves may re-read it a fair number of times without exhausting it. To end with another golden sentence, I'll quote from Samuel R. Delany: "Literature gives us the insight of memory without the wounds of experience." RAWL

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CAMERA OBSCURA

by Ted H. Strauss

If you follow the psychic press, then you won't find the basis of this story quite so new as you might otherwise but that is hardly important. I have never seen the theme worked out this way before: and granting the basic assumptions, the possibilities are no less chilling than our new author suggests.

**Crofter House
New York City**

August 3, 1871

I, JAMES LLOYD CROFTER, know precisely when I shall die: tonight, at midnight.

The manner of my death will be unique. I shan't commit suicide, nor succumb to natural causes, nor be done in by an unexpected accident, for I have sealed myself in my study and shan't stir till it is over.

How then shall I die? If suicide, sickness, and mishap are eliminated, there remains only murder, and murder, of the most diabolical nature, it will be. I also know the identity of my executioner.

You will ask why, if I know how and by whose hand I am to die, I do not rush to the police seeking protection. This would be to no avail, there being no possible proof. That which has been set in motion cannot be reversed. Die I must.

It is now seven o'clock in the evening and I have been searching in vain for an antidote since the Devil's work was done at noon. Unless I hurry, I shan't succeed in recording all that has been and is to be. Therefore, I shall at once relate the

circumstances surrounding this whole dreadful affair, trusting that my words will be believed by the discoverer of this document. It will not be easy, though, as God is my witness, it is all true.

I was born in London, January 2, 1817, the only child of Aldous Leslie and Mary Louise Crofter, and heir to the vast wealth of Crofter Maritime Enterprises, Ltd. In 1837 my father established a branch of the shipping concern in New York. Always intensely curious about the daring land to the west, he took personal charge of the office, moving the family into a spacious three-story brownstone on lower Fifth Avenue. Being of college age at the time, I matriculated at Columbia University and was graduated in 1841 with honors and a Bachelor of Science degree in chemistry. Fascinated by photography, and particularly the work of Niepce and Daguerre, as presented to the French Academy of Sciences by Francois Arago in 1839, I was determined to make daguerreotypy my profession.

In full agreement, my father allotted the entire third floor of the brownstone to me, providing a handsome studio and roomy laboratory stocked with the latest photographic equipment. Before long I was successful, and had even attained some note in the press for my daguerrian experiments.

Then, in early spring of 1848 tragedy shook my protected world. While chatting with friends one Sunday, my parents were struck and killed by a runaway horse drawing a heavy Brewster park carriage.

Two weeks later, I was in the Broadway office of Cyrus Heston, my father's attorney, for the reading of the will. My heart was heavy and I lost track of the old barrister's words as he droned through the legal language, my concentration returning only as he concluded, "... James Lloyd Crofter to whom, as my last surviving heir, should my beloved wife Mary Louise predecease him, I bequeath my entire estate and title to my home."

Heston laid the will on his mahogany desk. "I'm so sorry,

James. Such a loss. I just don't know what to say. If there's anything I can do . . ."

I got up slowly. "Thanks, but . . . I'll be all right. Hard work is the best thing for me now. If you'll just take care of straightening out Father's affairs . . ."

"Of course, and you'll have an accounting the minute it's completed." Shaking my hand solemnly, the lawyer saw me to the door.

The succeeding months were a nightmare. Burdened with grief, I still maintained my demanding schedule of photographic appointments by day, and worked in my laboratory far into the night, and so fought off depression. Yet I fear my health and appearance suffered from the strain. Despite the hovering attentions of the servants (all of whom I had retained), I ate little and slept less.

One morning, as I was hurrying from my laboratory to the studio, old Cummings, the major-domo who'd been in the Crofter household since before my birth, stopped me. "Master James," he said with a troubled look on his lined face, "you're wasting away."

I glanced in the full-length hall mirror . . . and recoiled. The gaunt, ashen-faced figure that peered back at me, dark circles under its bloodshot eyes, black hair uncut and carelessly combed, spotted blue trousers and chemical-stained green frock coat hanging on a haggard frame, looked more like a weather-beaten scarecrow than a well-to-do photographer.

"My God," I exclaimed. "I hadn't realized."

Cummings was concerned itself. "If I may suggest, sir, you badly need a change. Some time in the fresh air and an evening out with friends would do wonders." The old butler became fatherly. "I understand your grief, sir. We all share it. But working yourself into an early grave won't help."

I smiled at the faithful servant and put my arm about his sagging shoulders. "You're right, Cummings. No more work today. Tomorrow I'll take a long walk in the sun. As for friends . . ."

Cummings interrupted gently. "An invitation just arrived from

Mr. Alexander Stuart, requesting your presence at a class reunion at his home Saturday evening."

"Alex? Lord, I haven't seen him since the funeral." I shook my head. "Alex . . . or anyone else." Looking again at the apparition in the mirror, I said, "Accept in my name, will you, Cummings?"

Three days later I presented myself at the door of the Stuart mansion on upper Fifth Avenue. Handing my high silk hat and topcoat to a butler and straightening my white evening waistcoat, I entered the ornate drawing room hesitantly.

"Jim Crofter, come in!" exclaimed Alex. He seemed to sense my embarrassment, for he added warmly, "The Class of '41 knows of your loss and understands. My parents are away on holiday so we've the run of the house."

I looked at my smiling ex-classmates converging on me, grasping my hand, murmuring condolences, and relaxed. Cummings was right; in the ensuing light-hearted reminiscences of college days, the weight of sorrow and fatigue began to lighten.

Later, in the austere, oak-panelled Stuart library, as I was deep in conversation with Alex about Poe's scandalous drunken behavior in Richmond during the summer, a commotion arose toward the front of the mansion, and a shrill, feminine voice was heard berating the doorman.

"Damn it," Alex muttered, rising abruptly. "I told her not to come here tonight."

Surprised by the uproar, I followed Alex into the foyer, where I found him confronted by a slender young woman, strikingly beautiful despite the fury that contorted her paint-smeared face. As she paced angrily before him, her silk dress swirled about her side-laced boots in rustling, rainbow-hued semicircles. Her gray flowered bonnet, askew atop masses of auburn curls, would have flown off but for the black bow that tied it beneath her chin.

Suddenly aware of my presence, she stopped, her green eyes narrowing as if groping to identify me. With a tired shrug, Alex said, "Jim, this is Marianne Vosque, the Greenwich Village artist." His face tightened. "Charming, isn't she!"

Before I could reply, she exploded, "You're a fine one to talk about charm, you thief!" She fixed me with an icy glare. "Do you know what this swindler has done? I've been slaving for three months painting his portrait, and now he refuses to pay me for it!"

"Of course I refuse," Alex snapped. "It's no damned good!"

"Stop it, both of you," I interrupted. I was grateful to Alex for having eased my gloom and felt concern for his position (Marianne Vosque was known as a quick-tempered, easily-offended portraitist). Yet, despite the ugliness of her mood, I found the fiery young woman alluring. "Bickering won't settle this. Alex, do you trust my photographer's eye to appraise artistic value?"

He nodded and, at the same time, Marianne Vosque snapped her fingers. "Of course, James Crofter. I *knew* I recognized you."

I held up my hand and she fell silent. "All right," I said. "I'll look at the painting and give you my judgment. Agreed?"

Sullenly, Alex nodded again.

"As for you, Miss Vosque, I don't think you'll accomplish anything more here tonight." I felt like an awkward schoolboy. "May . . . may I see you home now?"

They both stared at me, Alex in class-conscious surprise, the artist with intense curiosity and, I thought, disturbing eagerness. Then she said mockingly, "Yes, if you're not afraid you'll soil your social standing being seen with me." With a hate-filled glare at Alex, she elbowed the stunned doorman aside and yanked open the carved teakwood portal.

Hoping that Alex wouldn't think me a complete fool, I took my hat and coat from the foyer clothes tree and followed her into the chilly fall night.

As we drove in a hansom cab to her home, Marianne Vosque, calm now, linked her arm in mine (a forward gesture I found not unpleasing).

"Mr. Crofter," she said, "meeting you was a stroke of good fortune for both of us."

"I don't —" I began, but she hurried on.

"Portraiture is lucrative but sterile. My true passion will surprise you."

I smiled. "Anyone who reads about you in the press, Miss Vosque, would hardly be surprised at anything."

She bridled and withdrew her arm. The rest of the trip was spent in silence.

The cab stopped before a two-story wood frame house on McDougal Alley. It seemed run-down and brooding in the flickering light of the gas street lamps; the scraggly patches of ground separating it from its neighbors were littered and uncared-for.

I helped Marianne Vosque down, told the driver to wait, and walked with her up the creaking front steps to the door. I was distinctly uncomfortable, imagining incredulous eyes behind every window on the artists' street peering at my expensive attire.

She put a restraining hand on my arm and said in a strangely urgent voice, "Please come in for a while. There's something I must discuss with you."

"But it's nearly midnight," I protested.

"Please!"

I hesitated a moment; then turned and waved the cab away.

Smiling, she opened the dirt-streaked door and preceded me into a narrow hallway that smelled of dust and mice. Flinging open a door on the left she announced dramatically, "Mr. Crofter, this studio contains the tools of my trade."

Wavering gaslight threw shadows on the dingy walls and cast an eerie glow over the untidy groundfloor room, with its spotted easels, stacks of canvases, and palettes, brushes, and half-squeezed paint tubes.

"Over there, however," — and she pointed to a door secured with a heavy padlock — "I do my *real* work. Are you curious, Mr. Crofter?"

"Indeed."

"Of course," she said, savoring my puzzlement. "But, before I continue, I must have your absolute promise not to reveal a word about what you will see and hear to anyone."

Her tone was so demanding that I looked at her in surprise. "You have it." I was annoyed and disturbed, yet curiosity made me agree.

"All right," she said. "Your honesty is well known and, at this point, I badly need your help." Striding to the door, she opened the lock with a long key hidden in the folds of her dress, entered, and lit two hanging lamps. "Come in," she called.

The room beyond the door was smaller and totally in contrast to the disordered studio. A lead-topped table held retorts, burners, copper plates, and decanters labeled "Iodine," "Bromine," "Thiosulphate of Soda," "Gold Chloride," and "Mercury". Another burner was set beneath a metal cup. Beside the table stood a draped object from which protruded three slender wooden legs. I was standing in a daguerrian laboratory!

"Surprised?" Marianne Vosque said with wry humor.

"Astounded." Female photographers were a rarity; the education necessary for the craft was available only at all-male colleges.

She pulled two small stools from beneath the table and indicated that I should sit. She seemed to read my thoughts for she said, "Yes, I imagine you are astounded. It's not every day you meet a female photographer, is it? You men have done a fine job of shutting us out!"

She sat, lifted her dress, and crossed her legs. The sight of two well-turned ankles and calves shocked (and, I must admit, stimulated) me as much as the unique experience of sitting with a woman in her own laboratory.

"I'll be brief about myself," she continued. "You've heard of my father, Jean-Paul D'Estagne?"

"The landscape painter? I didn't know he had a daughter."

"Indeed he did, though he didn't have a wife." She laughed at my scandalized expression. "I never knew my mother. Some barmaid my father took up with after he left France, I suppose."

"But your name —"

"Appropriated from an obliging and instructive itinerant daguerrian artist . . . in return for favors rendered."

Why did I feel this strange attraction for a woman so contrary to my sensibilities?

She continued, "My father died five years ago. Ever since, I've lived in this house which he left me, painting portraits, first of local people, then, as I gained some recognition, those of your social set. But portraiture has merely financed my photographic experiments, an interest started by my daguerrian friend." She rose and began to pace. "After many trials, a suspicion began to take shape in my mind. Mr. Crofter, if the camera obscura can record the physical form of a person, why, by the substitution of a plate other than iodized silvered copper and resensitized with an alternative to bromine, could not the thought at the moment of exposure be captured graphically as well!"

"You're not serious!"

"Absolutely. Imagine yourself in a typical pose thinking of . . . oh, let's say . . . your house. Using my altered plate, I take your daguerreotype and, when it's developed, there you are and, just above the frontal region of your cerebral cortex, is the clear image of your home."

I shook my head. "That can't be done. No one's ever – "

She placed her hands on my shoulders. "You're wrong. I've all but achieved it. I'm on the threshold of thought photography!"

I didn't leave her house till dawn. By then, I'd become as fervent as she to see the stupendous undertaking completed. Into the wee hours I pored over notebooks filled with experimental results, examined test plates under her microscope, and asked hundreds of questions. There was no doubt of it. She was on the verge of a photographic revolution.

But she did need help. Within sight of success, she'd become bogged down by lack of materials – metals, chemicals, repair parts for her camera. My fortune could keep her working.

As the sun's first rays streamed through the studio into the laboratory, I rubbed my bleary eyes. I was exhausted, but knew my decision was made.

"Marianne," I said (for we'd progressed to first names by then), "you'll never complete your work here. You've set things

up well, but you have too little room and need too much equipment. Suppose we strike a bargain."

"Yes?" she said eagerly.

"Let me move all you've done to my larger laboratoy at Crofter House."

"Wonderful," she said, clapping her hands. "But, I want this to be *our* work."

I looked at her closely. Deep in the recesses of my mind a warning bell clanged. Then the wild excitement of the venture blocked out my uneasy thoughts. I wanted to share in it, but allowed one final, half-hearted protest to escape my lips. "But this is *your* discovery, Marianne. All you need from me is money. The credit should be yours."

She put her arms about my neck and kissed me. No one had ever been as brazenly forward with me before, yet I didn't object.

"I need more than money from you, Jim Crofter," she said, her large green eyes drilling into mine. Involuntarily, I shuddered. "I need your help and knowledge, and . . ." She left the remainder of her insinuating sentence hanging in the laboratory's pungent air.

I knew I was beaten. The scientist in me exulted, the man recoiled. "All right," I said. "If we succeed, we announce it to the world together. Agreed?"

"Agreed!" she cried. "And we *shall* succeed. We're joined now."

The warning bell jangled again. My head throbbed — from fatigue, excitement, and a dread of I knew not what. To cover my confusion I pulled my topcoat over my rumpled evening clothes and crushed my hat under my arm.

"I'll . . . I'll have the movers here this afternoon."

"Marvelous," she said, seeing me to the door. "And, Jim, let this seal the bargain." And she kissed me again, hard and demandingly.

As I hurried down the street, my lips felt seared and the warning bell had surged to a thunderous clamor.

In the succeeding months, we labored incessantly. At first, I spent the mornings attending to my photographic pursuits, the afternoons and evenings toiling beside the fanatic, single-minded woman. Gradually, however, as we felt ourselves coming closer to our goal, I devoted less time to my clients and, at last, gave up my own affairs entirely. By her overpowering eagerness, Marianne bound me to her. If I tired or hesitated for a moment, she cried, "We mustn't stop, Jim. We're so close!" Though my mind and body ached with exhaustion, I hadn't the words to refute her.

Naturally, my friends wondered at my seclusion. Early in our association, when I suggested that others might help us, Marianne exploded, "No! No one else must know of this. Not even your servants."

I protested in vain. When I worried about what friends might think, she said coldly, "Make up some excuse. Anything. I want no one prying into our affairs."

There was no arguing with her. I took the necessary steps to insure our privacy.

Our work, long an obsession with Marianne, now threatened to consume me too. Furthermore, her zeal bordered at times, I thought anxiously, on madness, and caused violent expressions of temperament. Seeming success was a tonic to her, eliciting gaiety that made her skip about the laboratory like a delighted child. But failure evoked destructive rage that left me sick with fear. At such times, she stormed about, smashing bottles, scattering notes, and kicking anything in her path.

So we labored through the long months. I envisioned the glory that surely must come at the end of our maddening search . . . and was blinded to the spider's web she had spun about me. At fleeting moments, late at night, her words came back to haunt me. "I need more than money from you, Jim Crofter." But I soon forgot them as I drifted into the feverish sleep that comes of overwork.

Time dragged on. We seemed mired in failure and frustration, Keyed to a fever pitch, nerves stretched to the snapping point, we toiled around the clock, never setting foot from the house . . . and still success eluded us.

Finally, after a particularly exasperating day, I slammed shut the notebook in which I was recording the dreary results of our latest fruitless experiment and shouted, "Damn it, I've got to get out of here!"

Marianne looked up, her pallid face twitching with anger. "We can't stop now!"

I grabbed her frail shoulders and shook her. "Don't you understand? I'll go *crazy* if I don't have some rest! I want to solve this as much as you do, but this pace is killing." I reached for my coat. "Are you coming with me?"

"No," she said firmly. "We're so close I can smell success. Go ahead. Relax. *I'm* not giving up."

Furious, I stormed from the house.

I returned early the next morning. The hours I'd spent at an out-of-the-way tavern had calmed my frayed nerves somewhat. Not wanting to disturb the servants, I let myself in and went straight to the laboratory.

Marianne was sitting in semi-darkness. As I entered, she jumped up; her elfin face, wreathed in a mocking grin, was suddenly illuminated by the flickering lamp over her head. "I've done it!" she cried.

"Done it?" I mumbled. My brain was still foggy with alcohol.

"While you were out relaxing," she said scornfully, "I found the last element in the equation." She picked up a plate coated with a reddish substance and reached for a camera and tripod. "Let's go to the rear lawn to test this. It's light enough now."

My mind abruptly clear, I followed her eagerly. Once outside, she said, "All right, stand over there and concentrate on something."

I took up a stance, determined to think of my house (as Marianne had originally suggested). But a split second before she took the picture, my eyes moved slightly and I saw her face. The intensity of triumphant avarice etched on it stunned me, blotting out all thoughts of the stately mansion. And precisely then she squeezed the bulb.

With fluttering hearts we rushed back to the laboratory to develop the plate. Scarcely daring to breathe, we watched as the daguerreotype gradually took form.

There I stood, staring at the camera with a startled look in my eyes, and, just above my cerebral cortex . . . oh, how shall I begin to describe it! All the fiends of hell could not have looked half as hideous as the horrible creature crouching, animal-like, over my head. Her face, barely discernible as human, was twisted with greed and cruelty. Her hands were long, grasping weapons with stiletto-sharp nails. The grotesque attitude of her body was that of a crazed monster ready to leap with lethal fury upon its victim.

I stood transfixed, aware that we had succeeded in photographing not only thoughts, but surrealistic appraisals of them as well!

My horrified gaze was broken by her terrible shriek; "So *that's* what you think of me!"

I knew then she'd grasped the full meaning of the achievement too. "Marianne," I said, "It's a mistake —"

"No!" she screamed. "No mistake. I'm a genius . . . but it's no good. Oh, my God . . ." She slammed the plate to the floor and ground it furiously under her heel. Then she slumped into a chair and, moaning, cradled her head in her arms.

I was speechless. After a while (mere seconds that seemed hours), she raised her head and stared at me coldly. "That *is* what you think of me, isn't it?" She was deadly calm now.

"Marianne, I swear —"

"Don't deny it. I know it's true." She walked to the door with resolution. "You may have my things sent back to my house as soon as possible."

"But the discovery . . . our agreement . . ."

She glared at me. "It won't be revealed, ever. By you *or* by me." She smiled crookedly as my eyes frantically sought the notebook. "No, the completed equation isn't recorded. It's in my head where it will remain, and without it the proper coating solution can't be reproduced." She continued icily, "Tell me, Jim, what would you say if I asked you to marry me?"

I imagine my face clearly registered my response, for she nodded. "I thought so. Then we're even. No marriage, no disclosure. And that's final!"

"Marianne," I said, acutely aware now of her derangement, "you'd give up fame for . . . mere spite?"

"That . . . and much more," she said darkly. As she walked to the door, her final words sliced through me. "I have work to do now. Perhaps you'll hear from me . . . some day." Then she was gone, and a cold chill raised the hairs on the back of my neck.

Following Marianne's abrupt departure, my existence gradually returned to normal. Knowing that I couldn't hope to duplicate her discovery, I resumed, and was soon lost in, my photographic pursuits. My friends, and particularly loyal Alex, never questioned my long absence from social life, or alluded to the scandalous months spent behind locked doors with the artist.

For her part, Marianne seemed to have dropped into limbo. Accounts of her wild Bohemian life, so prevalent before our ill-starred venture, never again appeared in the press after she left Crofter House. I assumed she'd returned to portraiture in Greenwich Village but, if so, she remained out of the public eye.

Time dulled the terrible memories. Yet, years after, I would still awaken in the dead of night, damp with perspiration, a victim of recurring nightmares of evil, all in the distorted form of Marianne Vosque.

It is almost twenty-six years to the day now since Alex Stuart's fateful party and, at fifty-seven, I'm not as spry as I once was. The long noontime walks of my youth have been supplanted by short trips by carriage to a Fifth Avenue restaurant for a light lunch.

A few moments before twelve today, as I was returning from such a meal, I thought I caught a glimpse of a dark-cloaked figure standing in the shadow of the house adjoining mine. When I looked again, it was gone. Vaguely disturbed, I entered my house and went straight to the study.

I had barely opened my appointment book when a butler

knocked and entered, bearing an envelope on a silver tray. "This message just arrived for you, sir," he said.

I shifted uneasily at my desk. "Who delivered it?"

"A person in a black-hooded cape."

"A person?"

"Yes, sir. I couldn't tell whether it was a man or a woman."

He waited patiently as I picked up the long, gray envelope. My heart pounded sickeningly. There was no mistaking the handwriting.

"All right," I said, controlling my voice. "That will be all."

The butler bowed out of the study. Without knowing why, I got up and locked the door. Then with shaking and oddly benumbed hands I slit the envelope open.

It contained a single sheet of cheap bond paper, covered on both sides with Marianne's familiar pinched penmanship.

My dear Jim,

I shall waste few words regarding my existence since we parted, for you have little time left and must know that which is of sole concern to you now.

I have lived alone in my house in Greenwich Village with but one consuming passion: To discover a method of repaying your cruel and heartless thoughts of me. That has now been done!

After leaving your mansion, I devoted myself night and day to perfecting what I came to realize was the ultimate refinement of my achievement. I reasoned that, if I had succeeded (with some small pecuniary help from you) in photographing thoughts, far more could yet be accomplished.

Simply stated, a photograph is a reproduction of a subject, and evaluation thought photography is a graphic duplication of the subject's mental assessments. Both are recreations of an original. Why could I not devise a means of *transferring*, rather than merely *recreating*? That is, perfect a coating which, when applied to a daguerrian

plate, would remove the physical and mental life of the subject and invest it in the photograph instead.

But a photograph is fixed, incapable of sustaining life. And the subject, deprived of breath and thought, would, of course, as the translocation slowly took place, die.

This I have done and, in the process, devised the truly perfect murder, one which only you, my very dear colleague, can fully appreciate!

There remains nothing now to say but this: Late this morning, I hid in a recess of the house next to yours. When you returned from lunch at noon (your movements are well known to me), I took your picture. The transfer process is accomplished in precisely ten hours, and at two p.m. the plate was in position over a cup of heated mercury. Therefore, at the stroke of midnight, you will be dead!

All my notes pertaining to the process were burned yesterday and, at one minute after midnight, I shall destroy the photograph.

Leave what record of this you will. Who will believe you?

M.

I can write no more. My body is numbing rapidly . . . and . . . my mind . . . is clouding . . . over . . .



TALES FROM CORNWALL

by David H. Keller, M.D.

(author of *The Abyss*, *Heredity*, etc.)

No. 8 *The Bride Well*

As Paul Spencer pointed out in our last issue, DAVID H. KELLER was a staunch admirer of the works of James Branch Cabell, and while there is a touch of Cabell in all of the *Tales From Cornwall*, it comes out most clearly in the Cecil, Overlord sequences, of which this is the fourth.

IT WAS NOT TILL we had arrived within the boundaries of my beloved Cornwall that I realized my appearing before my subjects with a Welsh lady might not be either understood or accepted by those sturdy knights who had been so faithful during the early months of my reign. It was all well enough to rescue the so lovely Ruth and even spend long minutes driving the devil back into her body with long, lingering kisses; but to brazenly bring the same lady back to my domains might cause political disturbances of a direst nature. Yet, at the same time, there was

Ruth, on the horse in front of me; and, from certain clinging habits she had spontaneously developed, I had every reason to believe she intended to remain within the curve of my left arm, waist-bound, for the rest of her life.

"I am Overlord of Cornwall," at last I made bold to say, "and much of my support comes from nobles with marriageable daughters. As long as I remain a bachelor, these nobles will remain my friends, but if they saw you and found you were from Wales, jealous dissensions would at once arise. So we shall stop at the next chapman's and buy masculine apparel for you, and you can go to my castle as a page."

"Shall I be your page," Ruth asked.

"Oh, I presume so. At least I will have no other, and you can run my errands for me, and bind on my armor when I go giant-hunting."

"That will be nice. I think I shall look well in boy's clothes. I used to wear them when I was much younger. Will you give me a boy's name?"

We talked it over and decided to call her Percy. Later in the day we met an itinerant who was selling clothing to those who could buy, and I made a shrewd trade with him, so when Ruth came from behind the bushes she looked like a young lad, not yet shaven. The peddler took her clothes and some silver and left us.

After that I made Ruth ride behind me, and, if there was any holding to do, she could do it. All that day and one more day we rode, and at night we arrived at my castle. Giving orders that my faithful charger be well fed and bedded, and that the treasures I brought with me be safely secured behind lock and bar, I trudged wearily to my rooms to remove the iron and leather harness that seemed so necessary for a ruler to wear when out on the lonely roads of his country. I bethought me of King Arthur, who made his land so safe that a golden bracelet hung on a thorn bush for three years without being disturbed while it waited for its rightful owner. That was the kind of country I wanted Cornwall to be, some day.

Percy came after me into the privacy of my rooms, and ere I was aware, started to take off my armor and cleverly found sweet oil to rub me with and then helped me put on my silks and soft velvets. Before I realized it, I was in comfort before the fire, and she holding out to me a horn of spiced ale, which it seems she had ordered for my pleasure on her way up the stone stairs.

After that came some pleasant days in the library. Ruth could not read, but she had a willingness to learn. Her frank statement that I knew more than she did was decidedly refreshing to my masculine pride. In my astonishing adventures in the Apurimac Valley, the Blessed Islands, Cabel and Dehomey, I had met many women, but never one who willingly acknowledged my intellectual supremacy. The simple child seemed anxious to learn, so I permitted her to look through my books and I read to her some pages of my personal history, and after many hours I was pleased to find that she had learned to read, though still showing a preference for picture books. Of course she wore her boy's clothing and I was very careful to call her Percy, but occasionally, when we were alone, I graciously gave her osculatory treatment for the devil I had forced to enter her.

It was all very lovely and might have continued for an eternity of pleasant evenings, at least for several months, had it not been for an unexpected and slightly embarrassing visit from several of my mightiest nobles. There were only three of them, but they were so powerful in the affairs of Cornwall that they might as well have been thirty or three hundred. I received them in the library, first telling Percy to begone and stay begone till she knew they were safely out of the castle. To help the page pass the time while away from me, I gave her a book wherefrom she could learn her letters and thus improve her ability to read.

Before the fire the good knights, Belvidere, Arthur and Mallory, sat warming their shins and drinking my wine, the while looking at each other and then sidewise at me as though uncertain as to who should begin the conversation or as to the

effect it would have on their Overlord. At last Mallory coughed and began to tell me what was on their minds.

"You must be willing to acknowledge, Cecil, son of James and grandson of David, and even back to the son of Raymond, that your arrival in our country and becoming Overlord has been a matter of deep mystery to us all."

"There is no doubt that it was most unusual," I replied.

"We admit that we needed a strong man as ruler. There were robbers, giants and demons within the realm and many strong and jealous countries around us, anxious for our downfall. You arrived at an opportune time, and thanks to your ability as a giant-killer and politician you have given Cornwall a sense of security that, before your advent, it strangely lacked."

"My record speaks for itself," I almost boasted. "Five robber gangs dispersed and from these over a hundred killed in battle or hung to dead limbs to warn all evil-doers against acting thus in my confines. Three giants, seven deadly serpents, one dragon and a number of salamanders and ogres have been sent to Limbo. Thanks to my magical powers, Queen Broda, of Ireland married our Lord Figzhugh and now that country is very friendly to us. Wales does not dare to attack us. In fact, only a short time ago, I adventured there and rid their land of a most horrific curse, following which remarkable feat of valorous knighthood King Conwyn gave me many jewels and other presents of great value. I am going to sell some of these, buy food and give it to my folk against the cold of next winter. Thus there is no doubt, at least in my mind, that Cornwall hath profited by my taking charge of the affairs of state."

Belvidere swore a mighty oath: "By the bones of the eleven thousand and one virgins of Cologne, no one can dispute the truth of all you say, and, speaking for us three, and we represent the country, I am sure that we value your services as Overlord, though your bookish ways are beyond us—."

"Ah" I interrupted, "but you have not seen all my books. Now I am sure that if you looked through my copy of *Elephantis*—Where is my copy? I always keep it right here. That

dog of a page must have taken it. Anyway, I am certain you would have keen enjoyment from its inspection."

"That may be, but we are not monks. None of us understands the art of reading."

"You do not have to read. The book of *Elephantis* is one of pictures only."

"That would be different. But to go on where your Worship broke into my argument. We like you and appreciate your clever manner of ruling the country; but what would happen to us should you die of the Black Plague? You have, as far as we know, neither kith nor kin, and, being unmarried, no children to make your dynasty secure. That is why we came here. To urge your marriage."

I lost no time in making answer.

"This is no new problem to me, my lords. I know I owe it to my country to marry and beget children, sturdy sons to help carry the burden and beautiful daughters to make fortunate alliances. But how can I marry? I am wise but not wise enough to select a wife from the beautiful virgins of Cornwall. I met Eleanor, daughter of Sir Belvidere and lost my heart to her, but the next day Sir Arthur rode by with his daughter Helen, and I realized that she is blonde, whereas Eleanor is brunette. Then the same week chance led me to the home of Sir Mallory, and his daughter Guinevere graced the banquet table. Tell me, my lords, with three such beauties to choose from, how can a man decide? If I marry Eleanor how can I keep the mystical beauties of the other two charmers from haunting my dreams? Shall I take Helen and offend the fathers of Guinevere and Eleanor? That is why I remain a bachelor. Am I right? Only by remaining single can I keep my beloved knights at peace and those darling girls with at least some degree of hope, for as long as I am single I am the rightful property of any woman artful enough to win me."

Sir Arthur smiled: "Very clever. That speech is on a par with your general performance since dropping into our country from nowhere. We know how you feel. You want to be fair with all of us; but at the same time you must marry. I hear that you are a worker of magic; that by your daemonical powers you

became Overlord and later secured the friendship of Ireland by removing the tail from our friend FitzHugh so he could marry Queen Broda. We are asking you to use this magic in selecting a bride. To the west of this castle, centering a fairy ring in the dark forest, is a bride well. A single man, looking into that well, sees the face of his future wife. We will gather there, the Cornwall nobles and their eligible daughters. You will look into the well, compare the picture you see there with the lovely damsels, and announce your decision. It is an ancient custom, and, as we know you are honest, will provide a satisfactory answer to our dilemma. For many hundreds of years our Overlords have thus selected their women. So the next night of the full moon we will gather there and you will provide a priest, and the selection and marriage will be the work of but a few minutes. Are you satisfied with the plan?"

"It is perfect," I replied. "It has all of the elements of white magic of the finest sort."

"Then," said Arthur, "Belvidere and I will be riding through the night. I understand Mallory will remain. He hath a shrew for wife, and the poor lad lets no opportunity slip to remain a night away from her, especially when he hath a leman with him." So saying he slapped Sir Mallory on the back and laughed heartily at his discomforture, and he and Sir Belvidere went out into the night.

"'Tis an odd way of selecting a queen," I remarked.

"So it is," agreed the grizzled old knight, "but hath no more gamble to it than any other way. Hundreds of years ago, 'tis said, the nobility gathered to see the selection of the bride, and, when the Overlord looked into the well he saw, instead of a reflection of a woman, a real one named Melusina, daughter of a Armorican fey called Pressina, and she, coming out of the well, demanded she become the Queen, and none could gainsay her right. They married, and, her clothing off, the poor Overlord found she was half woman and half snake. It was a great scandal and created new styles in clothes and pantofles. Many women claimed to be deformed just to be in style."

"Horrible! But how came she in the well?"

"No doubt placed herself there so she could marry the Overlord. Ha, ha! It would be too bad for that old tale to spread over Cornwall just now. A dozen wells would not hold the lovely women who covet you," and the old rogue poked me in my royal ribs as he drank another horn of ale. At last I had him escorted to his room, there to be cared for by his leman.

As soon as he left I called for Percy. I wanted to know where my copy of *Elephantis* was. As I suspected, she had taken it with her when she left the library and all the time I had thought she was studying her letters.

"How can you ever hope to become learned when you spend time looking at such pictures instead of devoting yourself to reading?" I scolded her.

"I do not want to be learned," she sulked.

"What do you want? Have you no desire to improve your condition in life?" I demanded.

Tears were her only answer, so I cuffed her on the ear and bade her begone for the night. It would be one week before the night of the full moon. If I was going to have a wife, then the best place for Percy or Ruth, or whatever his or her name was, would be back in Wales. So the next morning I had a pony packed with silken gowns and jewels and had her placed on an ambling pad in charge of two of my most trusted men-at-arms, and sent her on her way.

"Go back and marry your old miser," I said roughly, "and be an honest woman and the mother of children and cease your nonsense and your odd ways."

"I don't think you want me any more," she said very seriously, and the way she looked at me and pursed her lips made me regret what I had done.

"It is not that," I said in self-defense, "but as the Overlord of a great country I must marry and start a dynasty; so on your way, and occasionally think kindly of me, Ruth."

So off she went back to Wales, and I thought myself well rid of a dangerous situation; for now that I was to marry and settle down, there was only one way for me to live and that was

as an example to my people, a model of faithfulness and sobriety.

I sent for my seneschal. "Have all in readiness for many guests," I commanded.

"That I will do gladly, since I am pleased to know you are to marry, Lord Cecil," he replied. "Already I have men at work preparing a new bedroom for you, with the walls hung with beautiful tapestries appropriate to your new position. Leda and the Swan, and Hercules and the fifty and one maidens. There is an old story which I never could comprehend, and mayhaps my Lord can give me the right of it. Did Knight Hercules love the one maiden fifty times in one night or love the fifty maidens all in one night?"

"If he claimed either he was a liar, and it would be best not to have such pictures in my new bedroom, for my bride might be vexed when she compared me with this braggart from the mysterious East." With that I dismissed him and resumed the writing of my personal history, being anxious to bring it up to date and not certain how much time I would have after my marriage. However, I had written only a few pages when I was interrupted by a visitor, none other than the priest who had married Queen Broda.

"Hail, my dear sib," he said, and there was a twinkle in his eye. "Long since, I promised you power to conquer all who opposed you, but that power will not avail you after your wedding, for then you will be but a grain of wheat caught between the upper and the nether millstones of married life."

"Nonsense," I retorted. "I rule Cornwall and certainly should be able to govern my wife, as I intend to do."

"That is what you think! But you are going to learn a deal about women, and in a short time. I shall watch your future with interest. Since you will need a priest to marry you to this unknown damsel, it would be best for me to remain in the castle as your guest till the festivities are over. How is your history progressing? Doubtless you will add to it your adventures in Cornwall. You were wise in sending that page back to Wales. Now go on with your writing while I enjoy some of your old

manuscripts. You have a most interesting library, which is not to be wondered at, since I made the selection."

The next week was a busy one. I kept open house. All the nobility called, and many of them stayed the night. There were gruff fathers and solicitous mothers and attractive daughters, almost without number. Any bachelor who could not pick a bride from these Cornwall beauties was indeed hard to please. Naturally many efforts were made to influence me—gifts, private interviews, little intrigues of every nature; but I was able to act so wisely that when the night of the full moon came all of their relatives were satisfied that I would act fairly and be influenced only by the most honest comparison between the image in the well and the lady whom this image most resembled.

We waited anxiously while the moon rose full and golden. The priest was there in his sacerdotal robes. I was more and more certain that he was the mighty magician who had conquered in the Battle of the Toads, granted me my three wishes and made me Overlord of Cornwall. He must have read my thoughts, for he winked at me and gave me the sign of the Brethren. This cheered me greatly, for, without knowing why, I felt that he would so influence my choice that nothing but happiness would result therefrom. Sir Belvidere was there and Arthur and other loving fathers, fifty in all. It would be a hard and difficult choice and I was glad that a Master Magician had a hand in the affair.

Of course none approached the well. That right was reserved for me, and I was not to look into its depth until the moon was directly above it. It was a serious, silent gathering, each hoping against hope and each hoping something different. They could not all be right. Only one lovely woman could become bride and Queen.

I trembled a little. That was from the chill night air. At the same time it was not an easy matter, even for a hardened adventurer, to go through with the program. Suppose I should be forced to select Lord Mallory's daughter? I knew his wife, and there was no reason to think that the daughter would be otherwise. Oh, well! If the worst came to the worst, I could go hunting gerrymanders in Ethiopia.

At last the priest, who had assumed the position of master of ceremonies, called for silence and bade me walk straight to the well. The moon was now directly above the ancient hole. Trembling, I looked in, and at once covered my dazzled eyes. Then I took a step backward.

"Did you see an image therein?" asked the priest.

"I did."

"Then from these virgins select the one whose image you saw in the Bride Well."

"I cannot. She resembleth none of these waiting ladies."

My people murmured when they heard this. It was a hard statement I had made and one they could not understand. But I waved my hand regally and demanded silence.

"Here is a magical happening," I cried. "There is no image in the well, but rather a real woman. Priest, bid her come forth and tell her station in life. Have her explain how comes she here."

In seven different languages and five distinct dialects he called down the well, commanding the woman to come forth. She came, slowly, as though floating upward she came, stepping gracefully over the stone curbing. Then she made a deep curtsy and in a clear, beautiful voice, she spoke:

"I am Leonora,
Royal daughter
Of most royal parents.
I come from a land most noble,
Among men renowned.
That tract of earth is not
Over mid-earth,
Fellow to many peopled lands,
But is a celestial Paradise,
Beautiful is all that land
With delight blest.
I come from there to Cornwall,
To mate with him who reigns,
And shower love and riches
All over his domain."

Then, stretching her hands toward me, she cried to the priest, "Marry us forthwith, so we may, united, bless this fair land of Cornwall and its beloved people. Why should I care about leaving Paradise, when I can spend an eternity in Cornwall?"

She was regal. From the golden crown which held her glorious locks together down to the silver slippers on her little feet she was a rare mate for any Overlord. Something of this must have impressed my people. Perhaps they felt that it was a happy ending to what might have turned out to be a difficult situation. At least they cried their approval of the marriage.

Then, through the forest, came the sound of silvery horns and the neighing of horses and the dull roll of chariots. Who should it be but Queen Broda in her golden chariot with my friend, her husband, by her side. What magic procedure produced her arrival at this time? When I looked at the priest he winked. Good! With such a partner I would go far.

"Hail, Cecil, Overlord of Cornwall!" she cried. "Hail and thrice hail! I heard you were adventuring into the land of matrimony tonight, and, if the lady by your side is your bride, then your adventurings will be sweet indeed. But you have many damsels here who are unwed. It came to me to select fifty of my young nobles and offer them in marriage to your lovely maidens. With such marriages the friendship of Ireland and Cornwall will truly be made too strong to break."

Then into the moonlight came fifty Irishmen in purple robes and golden armlets and with gold chains around their necks, and they all had yellow hair. The Cornwall maidens could hardly wait till proper introductions were made. Then, by the same magic that had ruled the entire evening, the couples instantly fell in love and understandings were soon reached so that, after an hour of merry-making, there were fifty-one couples to be married by the priest instead of one.

Naturally, everyone went away happy. I entertained as many as I could in my castle, but at last came the hour when I was alone with my bride. She had slipped off her regal robes and draped her lovely body with a silken gown that more than amply proved her statement that she came from Paradise. I determined

to be stern with her. Now was the time to find out who was to rule.

"Why did you do it?" I asked.

"Why should I not? That night when Sir Mallory talked with you I hid behind the velvet curtain. What one woman can do, another can. You gave me the dresses and jewels and I made up my mind to use them. Of course you remember the poem? You read it to me several times and I memorized it, making only the necessary changes."

"Yes," I admitted, "the poem is *De Phoenix*. Of course it was all very ingenious and you looked more beautiful than ever as you rose from the well."

"Of course I had to practice that. It was hard to climb the ladder gracefully, but I would do anything for you, Cecil dear. And it all ended perfectly. Just like one of those stories you used to read to me."

She looked at me so sweetly, she clung to me so tenderly, she looked so adoringly into my eyes, that all my reserve melted. I crushed her to me.

"Oh, Ruth, Ruth! I am so glad it happened this way. No other woman would have had the courage to do it. I am so glad that you are my Queen. I do not believe I shall ever be able to stop kissing you."

We heard a half-smothered laugh. Turning, we faced the priest. "I just dropped in to say good-bye and wish you all kinds of happiness," he said. "You are going far in the world, Cecil, Overlord of Cornwall, with such a woman as wife. By the way, would you mind if I borrowed your copy of *Elephantis*? There is a Cardinal in Italy, a friend of mine, who has expressed the desire to see it."

"That is all right," I answered. "Just take it with you. Now that Ruth and I are married, I do not believe I shall care to spend as much time with *Elephantis* as I did."

"You will find me much nicer," cooed Ruth, as she clung to me.

Inquisitions

TOLKIEN: A LOOK BEHIND

The Lord Of The Rings

by Lin Carter

Ballantine Books, 1969; softcover original; 211pp, including introduction and appendices; 95c.

It was in 1955 or 1956, I believe, that L. Sprague de Camp, who did occasional book reviews for the science fiction magazines I was editing at the time, included in his latest batch a very favorable comment upon a three-volume fantasy novel by a British author of whom I had never heard before—J.R.R. Tolkien; the novel was, of course, *The Lord of the Rings*. I managed to obtain a set from my bookdealer without too much delay, and upon reading found that Sprague had not exaggerated in the slightest: this was most literate and very enjoyable fantasy, and it seemed to me that it needed every word of its length; it had wonderful breadth and enough depth to make it memorable and re-readable.

The novel turned out to be a sleeper, and when it appeared in soft-covered editions, in 1965, a quarter of a million copies were sold within the first ten months. (The reason for there being two soft cover editions is irrelevant here, but there's no reason to suspect that either soft-cover publisher has lost anything; and certainly the public has been the gainer, even though one edition is superior to the other.) And within the

fantasy/science fiction fan world, LOTR has become far more than a favorite; it has become virtually a cause. Tolkien societies as well as individual enthusiasts, all dedicated to discussing the novel and its characters, intricacies, etc., publishing, debating, holding conferences, expanding from the confines of "fandom" into the academic world—there has been nothing like it except perhaps the many Sherlock Holmes societies, which began in the '30s and have greatly proliferated within the last decade.

But there is one important difference: the various variations upon the Baker Street Irregulars are all rooted in the fundamental acceptance of a private joke. All are aware that this is a game, an elaborate pretense; to believe, actually, for one moment that Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson were real people, and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle no more than Watson's literary agent (although possibly the actual author of one case derived from the good doctor's notes) would utterly ruin the fun. On the other hand, the Tolkien organizations can be noted (so far as I have been able to ascertain) for grim and humorless earnestness. Not that this is entirely a bad thing; it has given impetus to many persons to indulge in scholarly processes which they might never have taken, otherwise, and surely the experience will have turned out to be valuable should the parties want to do research in some other subjects. But the annoying thing

about much of this activity is the amount of talk and writing that has come forth from neophytes who have read nothing *except* LOTR, and have no sense of proportion in relation to Tolkien's very fine work.

Here is where Lin Carter has done a valuable task as well as producing a book that is entirely readable and enjoyable for itself. There is no question of his admiration for Tolkien and his appreciation of *The Hobbit* and LOTR; but he puts both the author and the delightful stories into their proper perspective in the history of the romantic and epic tradition and the fantasy novel. Without becoming over-weighty and erudite to the point of tiresomeness (as the specialist and enthusiast is very likely to do), Carter gives us a solid foundation in the traditions which Professor Tolkien has maintained and advanced so well. After reading this, you may be moved to go to some of the prior works which he mentions—perhaps for the first time, perhaps to re-read after many years' neglect. In any event, however familiar some of this may be to you, the chances are that a fair amount will either be new or in the nature of a pleasant refresher. It will not result in diminishing your pleasure in LOTR.

Some of the writing in the fan press about Tolkien and LOTR has been absurd, some impossibly erroneous due either to the enthusiast's ignorance of the literature in general or over-eagerness to uncover motivations and symbols and whatnot which just aren't there. I, for one, am thankful that I read LOTR when I did, for I'm not sure I'd have been interested later, after some of the gush I've read *about* it.

Tolkien has been magnified all out of proportion by uncritical (and un-selfcritical) admirers, and it would be a shame to see him suddenly disappear

from discourse in an equally unjust swing of the pendulum to the opposite extreme. Lin Carter's book may help avert such an event; but whether it does or not, it's well worth reading, and keeping as a handy reference for Tolkien and his predecessors. RAWL

TWO DOZEN DRAGON EGGS

by Donald A. Wollheim

Powell Publications, 1969; softcover; 207pp including introduction by Forrest J. Ackerman; 95c.

In 1930, when I was in the first flush of enthusiasm over finally getting to read science fiction magazines regularly, I was both attracted and repelled by a cheap-looking pulp title called *ASTOUNDING STORIES OF SUPER SCIENCE*. The covers were fascinating, but the interior artwork and general tone of the magazine just didn't leave a comfortable feeling. This wasn't respectable, instructive narratives of scientific possibility, which would aid in one's education, it seemed; this was sensational trash, cheap plots laid in science fiction type backgrounds. I finally bought a couple of copies and reading them confirmed my fears. Not only that the stories were disappointing, but that there were hardly any ideas in them at all, and having this around the house might jeopardize my franchise to read *worthy* science fiction.

For the science fiction I loved was full of ideas. Fascinating, fantastic, wonderful ideas. Being innocent of such things as the proper way to write a commercial story, I saw little wrong in the fact that many of the tales I loved were little more than undeveloped ideas, narratives rather than stories, either plotless or very thin in plot. Nonetheless, they were the essence of the Gernsback type of science fiction and I loved them.

And I still love this type of story—a short or short-short story, which may or may not have a plot according to the traditional plot-formula, but has a fascinating and unusual idea, contains a brief but nonetheless meaty discussion of some of the background for the idea, and presents in narrative form one glimpse of something marvellous, strange, beautiful, terrifying, or even horrible.

That is why I enjoy the short stories of Donald A. Wollheim, and have enjoyed them since December 1933 when the January 1934 issue of *WONDER STORIES* appeared with his debut: *The Man From Ariel* (not in this volume). All twenty-four of these "dragon eggs" have appeared in magazines or other-type periodicals, though not all of them in regular fantasy or science fiction title magazines. The level of literary skill varies, and in some instances I do feel that to have used the original published version, rather than a carbon of the original mss., might have been better—but why quibble? None of them are dull, and most are good enough to my taste so that I'd run them virtually as they stand were they to cross my desk for the first time today. Some are too outdated to publish for the first time in a current magazine, but fine for re-reading in a collection.

I'd better say good things about this collection because not only am I mentioned frequently in the fascinating brief introductions by the author, but I was personally involved in the sale of nearly half of them! One, *Mimic*, I still remember with delight as having sold to Alden H. Norton of Popular Publications, when I was DAW's agent, and Norton was editing *ASTONISHING STORIES* and *SUPER SCIENCE STORIES* (the original publication to bear the second title); and there are nine more which had their first appearance in magazines I edited; four of these come

from *MAGAZINE OF HORROR*. But camaraderie to the side, the main reason I'm praising them now is because I've just re-read the entire twenty four and still enjoy them. And I'm in entire sympathy with the author in respect to *The Garrison*, which, you may recall, appeared in MOH No. 8, April 1965: to have developed this story according to convention would have spoiled the chilling effect it has and made it commonplace, however readable a story came from it.

Something has been lost in the process of improving science fiction, even though much has been gained. I wouldn't give up or repeal any of the gains, but there's no need utterly to abandon what was valuable in the older approach; for there are times when, if too much is spelled out, too much developed, you do not end up with a better story but a spoiled and poorer one. H.P. Lovecraft had the essence of this in mind when he spoke of the impact to be had from brief *glimpses*, rather than detailed exposures. (And, to my mind, one of the most effective things about the otherwise botched film version of H. G. Wells' *War of the Worlds* was that one only got a second's glimpse of one of the Martians themselves—at least in the prints I saw at local theaters in NYC. It was chilling. Further exposure and it would begin to be laughable.) Steffan B. Aletti was speaking about the same thing when he noted the superiority, for horror, of the radio broadcast version of *The Monkey's Paw*, over a T.V. version.

What is lost is the opportunity to stretch the imagination, to delight or terrify oneself over the implications. In none of these two dozen stories do you find a reader-cheater, as one often did in the Gernsback days; and some of them are short-short stories with full plots, developed as much as need be. So I recommend *Two Dozen Dragon Eggs*,

and my only complaint is on the production job, which is sloppier in places than need be; read the collection for what it is, and there's a sporting chance you'll be entertained and possibly stimulated the way some of us veterans used to be.

PUBLICATIONS

Fred Lerner, 98-B, The Boulevard, East Paterson, New Jersey 07407, has sent me *An Annotated Checklist of Science Fiction Bibliographical Works*, 6 neatly reproduced pages, 50c postpaid. This doesn't seem like much, and it isn't for the general reader, but the information here is valuable and at best very difficult to obtain elsewhere. For libraries and researchers.

Leslie J. Turek has sent me a copy of the *Index to the Science Fiction Magazines 1968*, published by the New England Science Fiction Association, Box G, MIT Branch Station, Cambridge, Mass. 02139; it sells for \$1.00. This is the third annual supplement to the *MIT Index to Science Fiction Magazines, 1951-1966* and is well worth the asking price if you want a handy reference. Like the master index, this can be used three ways (a) if you want to know the full lineup of contents of a particular issue of any of the magazines dated 1968 (b) if you remember the title of a story, but forget who wrote it (c) if you remember the author, but forget the title — and in the process, you'll see all the other titles to be credited to the author for that year. For those who missed them, the supplements for 1966 and 1967 can still be had at the same price as this new one.

Robert Weinberg, 127 Clark Street, Hillside, New Jersey 07205, has sent me a copy of *A Reader's Guide to the Cthulhu Mythos*, 9 letter-sized

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mimeographed pages (and while all of them were not perfectly clean in my copy, they're readable), which he is selling for 50c postpaid. This is a specialist publication, but of broader interest than the Lerner one, in a sense, since there are likely to be more readers of MOH who might like to know about the Cthulhu Mythos stories by Lovecraft, the extension of them by August Derleth, and the numerous tales which can be more or less considered in the Cthulhu orbit by other authors. The stories are listed alphabetically by title, then again by author and this time places and dates of publication are given; there is further a listing of those which have not been reprinted since their original appearance, a list of books containing stories in this orbit, as well as interesting notes on the stories. If I hadn't received a review copy, this is one checklist i'd lose no time in paying for.

Incidentally, it's flattering to find my own story, *The Abyss* (MOH No. 12), leading off the listing by title, but I'm not convinced that it belongs there at all. Mr. Weinberg is a strict constructionist in

his selection of stories after HPL which really can be said to play a part in the Cthulhu Mythos; he confines them to tales which actually deal with a struggle between the Great Old Ones and their allies and humans with or without the aid of the Elder Gods — the plot being an attempt of the Great Old Ones to return to power on Earth and its frustration. Thus tales concerned with marginal matters such as *The Necronomicon* and other imaginary volumes of like nature (such as my own *Song of Yste*) and the anomalies and horrors described therein, do not really belong in the Mythos. For that reason, he does not list Lovecraft's powerful short tale, *The Festival*, and others like it, which deal with entities mentioned in *The Necronomicon*. But my own short tale is equally marginal.

HPL himself was a loose constructionist, and included all of such marginal stories as part of his Mythos. And it really does not matter too much which way you or I prefer it, though I prefer strict constructionism here; however, it would help if the strict constructionist remains consistent.

ANNOUNCEMENT

We regret that circumstances attending both the production and distribution of our magazines has forced us to increase our cover price, and make them all quarterly publications. This will not affect the subscription status of any of you who have subscriptions to the titles that had been appearing every other month. You did not subscribe for a definite *period* (one year) but for a *definite number of issues*: 6.

LIGEIA

by Edgar Allen Poe

In our first issue of *WEIRD TERROR TALES* (Winter 1969/70), we contrasted a story by EDGAR ALLAN POE with one by his famous admirer and successor, H. P. Lovecraft; this time we contrast one of EAP's tales with that of another no less noteworthy successor.

I CANNOT, FOR MY SOUL, remember how, when, or even precisely where, I first became acquainted with the lady Ligeia. Long years have since elapsed, and my memory is feeble through much suffering. Or, perhaps, I cannot *now* bring these points to mind, because, in truth, the character of my beloved, her rare learning, her singular yet placid cast of beauty, and the thrilling and enthralling eloquence of her low musical language, made their way into my heart by paces so steadily and stealthily progressive, that they have been unnoticed and unknown. Yet I believe that I met her first and most frequently in some large, old, decaying city near the Rhine. Of her family — I have surely heard her speak. That it is of a remotely ancient date cannot be doubted. Ligeia! Ligeia! Buried in studies of a nature more than all else adapted to deaden impressions of the outward world, it is by that sweet word alone—by Ligeia—that I bring before mine eyes in fancy the image of her who is no more. And now, while I write, a recollection flashes upon me that I have *never known* the

paternal name of her who was my friend and my betrothed, and who became the partner of my studies, and finally the wife of my bosom. Was it a playful charge on the part of my Ligeia? or was it a test of my strength of affection, that I should institute no inquiries upon this point? or was it rather a caprice of my own—a wildly romantic offering on the shrine of the most passionate devotion? I but indistinctly recall the fact itself—what wonder that I have utterly forgotten the circumstances which originated or attended it? And, indeed, if ever that spirit which is entitled *Romance*—if ever she, the wan and the misty-winged *Ashtophet* of idolatrous Egypt, presided, as they tell, over marriages ill-omened, then most surely she presided over mine.

There is one dear topic, however, on which my memory fails me not. It is the *person* of Ligeia. In stature she was tall, somewhat slender, and, in her latter days, even emaciated. I would in vain attempt to portray the majesty, the quiet ease of her demeanor, or the incomprehensible lightness and elasticity of her footfall. She came and departed as a shadow. I was never made aware of her entrance into my closed study, save by the dear music of her low sweet voice, as she placed her marble hand upon my shoulder. In beauty of face no maiden ever equalled her. It was the radiance of an opium-dream—an airy and spirit-lifting vision more wildly divine than the phantasies which hovered about the slumbering souls of the daughters of Delos. Yet her features were not of that regular mould which we have been falsely taught to worship in the classical labors of the heathen. "There is no exquisite beauty," says Bacon, Lord Verulam, speaking truly of all the forms and *genera* of beauty, "without some *strangeness* in the proportion." Yet, although I saw that the features of Ligeia were not of a classic regularity—although I perceived that her loveliness was indeed "exquisite," and felt that there was much of "strangeness" pervading it, yet I have tried in vain to detect the irregularity and to trace home my own perception of "the strange." I examined the contour of the lofty and pale forehead—it was faultless—how cold indeed that word when applied to a majesty so divine!—the skin rivalling the purest ivory, the commanding extent and

repose, the gentle prominence of the regions, above the temples; and then the raven-black, the glossy, the luxuriant, and naturally-curling tresses, setting forth the full force of the Homeric epithet, "hyacinthine!" I looked at the delicate outlines of the nose—and nowhere but in the graceful medallions of the Hebrews had I beheld a similar perfection. There were the same luxurious smoothness of surface, the same scarcely perceptible tendency to the aquiline, the same harmoniously curved nostrils speaking the free spirit. I regarded the sweet mouth. Here was indeed the triumph of all things heavenly—the magnificent turn of the short upper lip—the soft, voluptuous slumber of the under—the dimples which sported, and the color which spoke—the teeth glancing back, with a brilliancy almost startling, every ray of the holy light which fell upon them in her serene and placid yet most exultingly radiant of all smiles. I scrutinized the formation of the chin—and there too, I found the gentleness of breadth, the softness and the majesty, the fullness and the spirituality, of the Greek—the contour which the god Apollo revealed but in a dream, to Cleomenes, the son of the Athenian. And then I peered into the large eyes of Ligeia.

For eyes we have no models in the remotely antique. It might have been, too, that in these eyes of my beloved lay the secret to which Lord Verulam alludes. They were, I must believe, far larger than the ordinary eyes of our own race. They were even fuller than the fullest of the gazelle eyes of the tribe of the valley of Nourjahad. Yet it was only at intervals—in moments of intense excitement—that this peculiarity became more than slightly noticeable in Ligeia. And at such moments was her beauty—in my heated fancy thus it appeared perhaps—the beauty of beings either above or apart from the earth—the beauty of the fabulous Houri of the Turk. The hue of the orbs was the most brilliant of black, and, far over them, hung jetty lashes of great length. The brows, slightly irregular in outline, had the same tint. The "strangeness," however, which I found in the eyes, was of a nature distinct from the formation, or the color, or the brilliancy of the features, and must, after all, be referred to the *expression*. Ah, word of no meaning! behind whose vast latitude of mere

sound we intrench our ignorance of so much of the spiritual. The expression of the eyes of Ligeia! How for long hours have I pondered upon it! How have I, through the whole of a midsummer night, struggled to fathom it! What was it—that something more profound than the well of Democritus—which lay far within the pupils of my beloved. What *was* it? I was possessed with a passion to discover. Those eyes! those large, those shining, those divine orbs! they became to me twin stars of Leda, and I to them devoutest of astrologers.

There is no point, among the many incomprehensible anomalies of the science of mind, more thrillingly exciting than the fact—never, I believe, noticed in the schools—that in our endeavors to recall to memory something long forgotten, we often find ourselves *upon the very verge* of remembrance, without being able, in the end, to remember. And thus how frequently, in my intense scrutiny of Ligeia's eyes, have I felt approaching the full knowledge of their expression—felt it approaching—yet not quite be mine—and so at length entirely depart! And (strange, oh, strangest mystery of all!) I found, in the commonest objects of the universe, a circle of analogies to that expression. I mean to say that, subsequently to the period when Ligeia's beauty passed into my spirit, there dwelling as in a shrine, I derived, from many existences in the material world, a sentiment such as I felt always aroused, within me, by her large and luminous orbs. Yet not the more could I define that sentiment, or analyze, or even steadily view it. I recognized it, let me repeat, sometimes in the survey of a rapidly-growing vine—in the contemplation of a moth, a butterfly, a chrysalis, a stream of running water. I have felt it in the ocean—in the falling of a meteor. I have felt it in the glances of unusually aged people. And there are one or two stars in heaven (one especially, a star of the sixth magnitude, double and changeable, to be found near the large star in Lyra) in a telescopic scrutiny of which I have been made aware of the feeling. I have been filled with it by certain sounds from stringed instruments, and not unfrequently by passages from books. Among innumerable other instances, I well remember something in a volume of Joseph Glanvill, which

(perhaps merely from its quaintness—who shall say?) never failed to inspire me with the sentiment: "And the will therein lieth, which dieth not. Who knoweth the mysteries of the will, with its vigor? For God is but a great will pervading all things by nature of its intentness. Man doth not yield him to the angels, nor unto death utterly, save only through the weakness of his feeble will."

Length of years and subsequent reflection have enabled me to trace, indeed, some remote connection between this passage in the English moralist and a portion of the character of Ligeia. An *intensity* in thought, action, or speech was possibly, in her, a result, or at least an index, of that gigantic volition which, during our long intercourse, failed to give other and more immediate evidence of its existence. Of all the women whom I have ever known, she, the outwardly calm, the ever-placid Ligeia, was the most violently a prey to the tumultuous vultures of stern passion. And of such passion I could form no estimate, save by the miraculous expansion of those eyes which at once so delighted and appalled me—by the almost magical melody, modulation, distinctness, and placidity of her very low voice—and by the fierce energy (rendered doubly effective by contrast with her manner of utterance) of the wild words which she habitually uttered.

I have spoken of the learning of Ligeia: it was immense—such as I have never known in woman. In the classical tongues was she deeply proficient, and as far as my own acquaintance extended in regard to the modern dialects of Europe, I have never known her at fault. Indeed upon any theme of the most admired because simply the most abstruse of the boasted erudition of the Academy, have I *ever* found Ligeia at fault? How singularly—how thrillingly, this one point in the nature of my wife has forced itself, at this late period only, upon my attention! I said her knowledge was such as I have never known in woman—but where breathes the man who has traversed, and successfully, *all* the wide areas of moral, physical, and mathematical science? I saw not then what I now clearly perceive, that the acquisitions of Ligeia were gigantic, were astounding; yet I was sufficiently aware of her infinite supremacy to resign myself, with a child-like

confidence, to her guidance through the chaotic world of metaphysical investigation at which I was most busily occupied during the earlier years of our marriage. With how vast a triumph—with how vivid a delight—with how much of all that is ethereal in hope did I *feel*, as she bent over me in studies but little sought—but less known—that delicious vista by slow degrees expanding before me, down whose long, gorgeous, and all untrodden path, I might at length pass onward to the goal of a wisdom too divinely precious not to be forbidden.

How poignant, then, must have been the grief with which, after some years, I beheld my well-grounded expectations take wings to themselves and fly away! Without Ligeia I was but as a child groping benighted. Her presence, her readings alone, rendered vividly luminous the many mysteries of the transcendentalism in which we were immersed. Wanting the radiant lustre of her eyes, letters, lambent and golden, grew duller than Saturnian lead. And now those eyes shone less and less frequently upon the pages over which I pored. Ligeia grew ill. The wild eyes blazed with a too-too glorious effulgence; the pale fingers became of the transparent waxen hue of the grave; and the blue veins upon the lofty forehead swelled and sank impetuously with the tides of the most gentle emotion. I saw that she must die—and I struggled desperately in spirit with the grim Azrael. And the struggles of the passionate wife were, to my astonishment, even more energetic than my own. There had been much in her stern nature to impress me with the belief that, to her, death would have come without its terrors; but not so. Words are impotent to convey any just idea of the fierceness of resistance with which she wrestled with the Shadow. I groaned in anguish at the pitiable spectacle. I would have soothed—I would have reasoned; but in the intensity of her wild desire for life—for life—*but* for life—solace and reason were alike the uttermost of folly. Yet not until the last instance, amid the most convulsive writhings of her fierce spirit, was shaken the external placidity of her demeanor. Her voice grew more gentle—grew more low—yet I would not wish to dwell upon the wild meaning of the quietly uttered words. My brain reeled as I

hearkened entranced, to a melody more than mortal—to assumptions and aspirations which mortality had never before known.

That she loved me I should not have doubted; and I might have been easily aware that, in a bosom such as hers, love would have reigned no ordinary passion. But in death only, was I fully impressed with the strength of her affection. For long hours, detaining my hand, would she pour out before me the overflowing of a heart whose more than passionate devotion amounted to idolatry. How had I deserved to be so blessed by such confessions?—how had I deserved to be so cursed with the removal of my beloved in the hour of my making them? But upon this subject I cannot bear to dilate. Let me say only, that in Ligeia's more than womanly abandonment to a love, alas! all unmerited, all unworthily bestowed, I at length recognized the principle of her longing, with so wildly earnest a desire for the life which was now fleeing so rapidly away. It is this wild longing—it is this eager vehemence of desire for life—*but* for life—that I have no power to portray—no utterance capable of expressing.

At high noon of the night in which she departed, beckoning me, peremptorily, to her side, she bade me repeat certain verses composed by herself not many days before. I obeyed her. They were these:—

Lo! 'tis a gala night
Within the lonesome latter years!
An angel throng, bewinged, bedight
In veils, and drowned in tears,
Sit in a theatre, to see
A play of hopes and fears,
While the orchestra breathes fitfully
The music of the spheres.

Mimes, in the form of God on high,
Mutter and mumble low,
And hither and thither fly ☸

Mere puppets they, who come and go
At bidding of vast formless things
That shift the scenery to and fro,
Flapping from out their condor wings
Invisible Woe!

That motley drama!—oh, be sure
It shall not be forgot!
With its Phantom chased for evermore,
By a crowd that seize it not.
Through a circle that ever returneth in
To the self-same spot;
And much of Madness, and more of Sin
And Horror, the soul of the plot!

But see, amid the mimic rout
A crawling shape intrude!
A blood-red thing that writhes from out
The scenic solitude!
It writhes!—it writhes!—with mortal pangs
The mimes become its food,
And the seraphs sob at vermin fangs
In human gore imbued.

Out—out are the lights—out all!
And over each quivering form,
The curtain, a funeral pall,
Comes down with the rush of a storm—
And the angels, all pallid and wan,
Uprising, unveiling, affirm
That the play is the tragedy, “Man,”
And its hero, the conqueror Worm

“O God!” half shrieked Ligeia, leaping to her feet and extending her arms aloft with a spasmodic movement, as I made an end of these lines—“O God! O Divine Father!—shall these things be undeviatingly so?—shall this conqueror be not once

conquered? Are we not part and parcel in Thee? Who—who knoweth the mysteries of the will with its vigor? Man doth not yield him to the angels, *nor unto death utterly*, save only through the weakness of his feeble will."

And now, as if exhausted with emotion, she suffered her white arms to fall, and returned solemnly to her bed of death. And as she breathed her last sighs, there came mingled with them a low murmur from her lips. I bent to them my ear, and distinguished, again, the concluding words of the passage in Glanvill: "*Man doth not yield him to the angels, nor unto death utterly, save only through the weakness of his feeble will.*"

She died; and I, crushed into the very dust with sorrow, could not longer endure the lonely desolation of my dwelling in the dim and decaying city by the Rhine. I had no lack of what the world calls wealth, Ligeia had brought me far more, very far more than ordinarily falls to the lot of mortals. After a few months, therefore, of weary and aimless wandering, I purchased and put in some repair, an abbey, which I shall not name, in one of the wildest and least frequented portions of fair England. The gloomy and dreary grandeur of the building, the almost savage aspect of the domain, the many melancholy and time-honored memories connected with both, had much in unison with the feelings of utter abandonment which had driven me into that remote and unsocial region of the country. Yet although the external abbey, with its verdant decay hanging about it, suffered but little alteration, I gave way, with a child-like perversity, and perchance with a faint hope of alleviating my sorrows, to a display of more than regal magnificence within. For such follies, even in childhood, I had imbibed a taste, and now they came back to me as if in the dotage of grief. Alas, I feel how much even of incipient madness might have been discovered in the gorgeous and fantastic draperies, in the solemn carvings of Egypt, in the wild cornices and furniture, in the Bedlam patterns of the carpets of tufted gold! I had become a bounden slave in the trammels of opium, and my labors and my orders had taken a coloring from my dreams. But these absurdities I must not pause

to detail. Let me speak only of that one chamber, ever accursed, whither, in a moment of mental alienation, I led from the altar as my bride—as the successor of the unforgotten Ligeia—the fair-haired and blue-eyed Lady Rowena Trevanion, of Tremaine.

There is no individual portion of the architecture and decoration of that bridal chamber which is not now visibly before me. Where were the souls of the haughty family of the bride, when, through thirst of gold, they permitted to pass the threshold of an apartment so bedecked, a maiden and a daughter so beloved? I have said that I minutely remember the details of the chamber—yet I am sadly forgetful on topics of deep moment; and here there was no system, no keeping, in the fantastic display, to take hold upon the memory. The room lay in a high turret of the castellated abbey, was pentagonal in shape, and of capacious size. Occupying the whole southern face of the pentagon was the sole window—an immense sheet of unbroken glass from Venice—a single pane, and tinted of a leaden hue, so that the days of either the sun or moon passing through it, fell with a ghastly lustre on the objects within. Over the upper portion of this huge window, extended the trellis-work of an aged vine, which clambered up the massy walls of the turret. The ceiling, of gloomy-looking oak, was excessively lofty, vaulted, and elaborately fretted with the wildest and most grotesque specimens of a semi-Gothic, semi-Druidical device. From out the most central recess of this melancholy vaulting, depended, by a single chain of gold with long links, a huge censer of the same metals, Saracenic in pattern, and with many perforations so contrived that there writhed in and out of them, as if endued with a serpent vitality, a continual succession of particolored fires.

Some few ottomans and golden candelabra, of Eastern figure, were in various stations about; and there was the couch, too—the bridal couch—of an Indian model, and low, and sculptured of solid ebony, with a pall-like canopy above. In each of the angles of the chamber stood on end a gigantic sarcophagus of black granite, from the tombs of the kings over against Luxor, with their aged lids full of immemorial sculpture. But in the draping of

the apartment lay, alas! the chief phantasy of all. The lofty walls, gigantic in height—even unproportionably so—were hung from summit to foot, in vast folds, with a heavy and massive-looking tapestry—tapestry of a material which was found alike as a carpet on the floor, as a covering for the ottomans and the ebony bed, as a canopy for the bed, and as the gorgeous volutes of the curtains which partially shaded the window. The material was the richest cloth of gold. It was spotted all over, at irregular intervals, with arabesque figures, about a foot in diameter, and wrought upon the cloth in patterns of the most jetty black. But these figures partook of the true character of the arabesque only when regarded from a single point of view. By a contrivance now common, and indeed traceable to a very remote period of antiquity, they were made changeable in aspect. To one entering the room, they bore the appearance of simple monstrosities; but upon a farther advance, this appearance gradually departed; and, step by step, as the visitor moved his station in the chamber, he saw himself surrounded by an endless succession of the ghastly forms which belong to the superstition of the Norman, or arise in the guilty slumbers of the monk. The phantasmagoric effect was vastly heightened by the artificial introduction of a strong continual current of wind behind the draperies—giving a hideous and uneasy animation to the whole.

In halls such as these—in a bridal chamber such as this—I passed, with the Lady of Tremaine, the unhallowed hours of the first month of our marriage—passed them with but little disquietude. That my wife dreaded the fierce moodiness of my temper—that she shunned me, and loved me but little—I could not help perceiving; but it gave me rather pleasure than otherwise. I loathed her with a hatred belonging more to demon than to man. My memory flew back (oh, with what intensity of regret!) to Ligeia, the beloved, the august, the beautiful, the entombed. I revelled in recollections of her purity, of her wisdom, of her lofty—her ethereal nature, of her passionate, her idolatrous love. Now, then, did my spirit fully and freely burn with more than all the fires of her own. In the excitement of my opium dreams (for I was habitually fettered in the shackles of the

drug), I would call aloud upon her name, during the silence of the night, or among the sheltered recesses of the glens by day, as if, through the wild eagerness, the solemn passion, the consuming ardor of my longing for the departed, I could restore her to the pathways she had abandoned—ah, *could* it be forever?—upon the earth.

About the commencement of the second month of the marriage, the Lady Rowena was attacked with sudden illness, from which her recovery was slow. The fever which consumed her rendered her nights uneasy; and in her perturbed state of half-slumber, she spoke of sounds, and of motions, in and about the chamber of the turret, which I concluded had no origin save in the distemper of her fancy, or perhaps in the phantasmagoric influences of the chamber itself. She became at length convalescent—finally, well. Yet but a brief period elapsed, ere a second more violent disorder again threw her upon a bed of suffering; and from this attack her frame, at all times feeble, never altogether recovered. Her illnesses were, after this epoch, of alarming character, and of more alarming recurrence, defying alike the knowledge and the great exertions of her physicians. With the increase of the chronic disease, which had thus, apparently, taken too sure hold upon her constitution to be eradicated by human means, I could not fail to observe a similar increase in the nervous irritation of her temperament, and in her excitability by trivial causes of fear. She spoke again, and now more frequently and pertinaciously, of the sounds—of the slight sounds—and of the unusual motions among the tapestries, to which she had formerly alluded.

One night, near the closing in of September, she pressed this distressing subject with more than usual emphasis upon my attention. She had just awakened from an unquiet slumber, and I had been watching, with feelings half of anxiety, half of vague terror, the workings of her emaciated countenance. I sat by the side of her ebony bed, upon one of the ottomans of India. She partly arose, and spoke, in an earnest low whisper, of sounds which she *then* heard, but which I could not hear—of motions which she *then* saw, but which I could not perceive. The wind

was rushing hurriedly behind the tapestries, and I wished to show her (what, let me confess it, I could not *all* believe) that those almost inarticulate breathings, and those very gentle variations of the figures upon the wall, were but the natural effects of that customary rushing of the wind. But a deadly pallor, overspreading her face, had proved to me that my exertions to reassure her would be fruitless. She appeared to be fainting, and no attendants were within call. I remembered where was deposited a decanter of light wine which had been ordered by her physicians, and hastened across the chamber to procure it. But, as I stepped beneath the light of the censer, two circumstances of a startling nature attracted my attention. I had felt that some palpable although invisible object had passed lightly by my person; and I saw that there lay upon the golden carpet, in the very middle of the rich lustre from the censer, a shadow—a faint, indefinite shadow of angelic aspect—such as might be fancied for the shadow of a shade. But I was wild with the excitement of an immoderate dose of opium, and heeded these things but little, nor spoke of them to Rowena. Having found the wine, I recrossed the chamber, and poured out a gobletful, which I held to the lips of the fainting lady. She had now partially recovered, however, and took the vessel herself, while I sank upon an ottoman near me, with my eyes fastened upon her person. It was then that I became distinctly aware of a gentle foot-fall upon the carpet, and near the couch; and in a second thereafter, as Rowena was in the act of raising the wine to her lips, I saw, or may have dreamed that I saw, fall within the goblet, as if from some invisible spring in the atmosphere of the room, three or four large drops of a brilliant and ruby colored fluid. If this I saw—not so Rowena. She swallowed the wine unhesitatingly, and I forebore to speak to her of a circumstance which must, after all, I considered, have been but the suggestion of a vivid imagination, rendered morbidly active by the terror of the lady, by the opium, and by the hour.

Yet I cannot conceal it from my own perception that, immediately subsequent to the fall of the ruby-drops, a rapid change for the worse took place in the disorder of my wife; so

that, on the third subsequent night, the hands of her menials prepared her for the tomb, and on the fourth, I sat alone, with her shrouded body, in that fantastic chamber which had received her as my bride. Wild visions, opium-engendered, flitted, shadow-like, before me. I gazed with unquiet eye upon the sarcophagi in the angles of the room, upon the varying figures of the drapery, and upon the writhing of the parti-colored fires in the censer overheard. My eyes then fell, as I called to mind the circumstances of a former night, to the spot beneath the glare of the censer where I had seen the faint traces of the shadow. It was there, however, no longer; and breathing with greater freedom, I turned my glances to the pallid and rigid figure upon the bed. Then rushed upon me a thousand memories of Ligeia—and then came back upon my heart, with the turbulent violence of a flood, the whole of that unutterable woe with which I had regarded *her* thus enshrouded. The night waned; and still, with a bosom full of bitter thoughts of the only and supremely beloved, I remained gazing upon the body of Rowena.

It might have been midnight, or perhaps earlier, or later, for I had taken no note of time, when a sob, low, gentle, but very distinct, startled me from my revery. I *felt* that it came from the bed of ebony—the bed of death. I listened in an agony of superstitious terror—but there was no repetition of the sound. I strained my vision to detect any motion in the corpse—but there was not the slightest perceptible. Yet I could not have been deceived. I *had* heard the noise, however faint, and my soul was awakened within me. I resolutely and perseveringly kept my attention riveted upon the body. Many minutes elapsed before any circumstance occurred tending to throw light upon the mystery. At length it became evident that a slight, a very feeble, and barely noticeable tinge of color had flushed up within the cheeks, and along the sunken small veins of the eyelids. Through a species of unutterable horror and awe, for which the language of mortality has no sufficiently energetic expression, I felt my heart cease to beat, my limbs grow rigid where I sat. Yet a sense of duty finally operated to restore my self-possession. I could no longer doubt that we had been precipitate in our

preparations—that Rowena still lived. It was necessary that some immediate exertion be made; yet the turret was altogether apart from the portion of the abbey tenanted by the servants—there were none within call—I had no means of summoning them to my aid without leaving the room for many minutes—and this I could not venture to do. I therefore struggled alone in my endeavors to call back the spirit still hovering. In a short period it was certain, however, that a relapse had taken place; the color disappeared from both eyelid and cheek, leaving a wanness even more than that of marble; the lips became doubly shrivelled and pinched up in the ghastly expression of death; a repulsive clamminess and coldness overspread rapidly the surface of the body; and all the usual rigorous stiffness immediately supervened. I fell back with a shudder upon the couch from which I had been so startlingly aroused, and again gave myself up to passionate waking visions of Ligeia.

An hour thus elapsed, when (could it be possible?) I was a second time aware of some vague sound issuing from the region of the bed. I listened—in extremity of horror. The sound came again—it was a sigh. Rushing to the corpse, I saw—distinctly saw—a tremor upon the lips. In a minute afterward they relaxed, disclosing a bright line of the pearly teeth. Amazement now struggled in my bosom with the profound awe which had hitherto reigned there alone. I felt that my vision grew dim, that my reason wandered; and it was only by a violent effort that I at length succeeded in nerving myself to the task which duty thus once more had pointed out. There was now a partial glow upon the forehead and upon the cheek and throat; a perceptible warmth pervaded the whole frame; there was even a slight pulsation at the heart. The lady *lived*; and with redoubled ardor I betook myself to the task of restoration. I chafed and bathed the temples and the hands, and used every exertion which experience, and no little medical reading, could suggest. But in vain. Suddenly, the color fled, the pulsation ceased, the lips resumed the expression of the dead, and, in an instant afterward, the whole body took upon itself the icy chilliness, the livid hue, the intense rigidity, the sunken outline, and all the loathsome

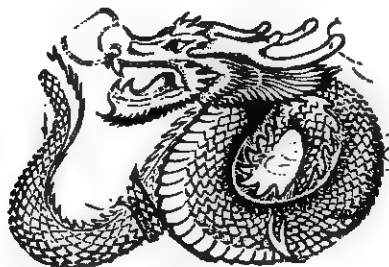
peculiarities of that which has been, for many days, a tenant of the tomb.

And again I sunk into visions of Ligeia—and again (what marvel that I shudder while I write?) *again* there reached my ears a low sob from the region of the ebony bed. But why shall I minutely detail the unspeakable horrors of that night? Why shall I pause to relate how, time after time, until near the period of the gray dawn, this hideous drama of revivification was repeated; how each terrific relapse was only into a sterner and apparently more irredeemable death; how each agony wore the aspect of a struggle with some invisible foe; and how each struggle was succeeded by I know not what of wild change in the personal appearance of the corpse? Let me hurry to a conclusion.

The greater part of the fearful night had worn away, and she who had been dead, once again stirred—and now more vigorously than hitherto, although arousing from a dissolution more appalling in its utter hopelessness than any. I had long ceased to struggle or to move, and remained sitting rigidly upon the ottoman, a helpless prey to a whirl of violent emotions, of which extreme awe was perhaps the least terrible, the least consuming. The corpse, I repeat, stirred, and now more vigorously than before. The hues of life flushed up with unwonted energy into the countenance—the limbs relaxed—and, save that the eyelids were yet pressed heavily together, and that the bandages and draperies of the grave still imparted their charnel character to the figure, I might have dreamed that Rowena had indeed shaken off utterly, the fetters of Death. But if this idea was not, even then, altogether adopted, I could at least doubt no longer, when, arising from the bed, tottering, with feeble steps, with closed eyes, and with the manner of one bewildered in a dream, the thing that was enshrouded advanced boldly and palpably into the middle of the apartment.

I trembled not—I stirred not—for a crowd of unutterable fancies connected with the air, the stature, the demeanor of the figure, rushing hurriedly through my brain, had paralyzed—had chilled me into stone. I stirred not—but gazed upon the apparition. There was a mad disorder in my thoughts—a tumult

unappeasable. Could it, indeed, be the *living* Rowena who confronted me? Could it, indeed, be Rowena *at all*—the fair-haired, the blue-eyed Lady Rowena Trevanion of Tremaine? Why, *why* should I doubt it? The bandage lay heavily about the mouth—but then might it not be the mouth of the breathing Lady of Tremaine? And the cheeks—there were the roses as in her noon of life—yes, these might indeed be the fair cheeks of the living Lady of Tremaine. And the chin, with its dimples, as in health, might it not be hers?—but *had she then grown taller since her malady*? What inexpressible madness seized me with that thought? One bound, and I had reached her feet! Shrinking from my touch, she let fall from her head, unloosened, the ghastly cerements which had confined it, and there streamed forth into the rushing atmosphere of the chamber huge masses of long and disheveled hair; *it was blacker than the raven wings of midnight!* And now slowly opened *the eyes* of the figure which stood before me. “Here then, at least,” I shrieked aloud, “can I never—can I never be mistaken—these are the full, and the black, and the wild eyes—of my lost love—of the Lady—of the Lady Ligeia.”



THE NAMELESS OFFSPRING

by Clark Ashton Smith

(author of *The Hunters From Beyond*, *The Colossus of Ylourgne*, etc.)

While CLARK ASHTON SMITH (1893-1961) does not imitate Poe directly, any more than H. P. Lovecraft did, the present tale deals with a theme which is decidedly in Poe's orbit, as well as Lovecraft's, and gives us the opportunity to note not only how these three masters resembled each other, but how they differed from each other.

Many and multiform are the dim horrors of Earth, infesting her ways from the prime. They sleep beneath the unturned stone; they rise with the tree from its root; they move beneath the sea and in subterranean places; they dwell in the inmost adyta; they emerge betimes from the shutten sepulchre of haughty bronze and the low grave that is sealed with clay. There be some that are long known to man, and others as yet unknown that abide the terrible latter days of their revealing. Those which are the most dreadful and the loathliest of all are haply still to be declared. But among those that have revealed themselves aforetime and have made manifest their veritable presence, there is one which may not openly be named for its exceeding foulness. It is that

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Illustration
by Rafael
De Soto

spawn which the hidden dweller in the vaults has begotten upon mortality.

From the "Necronomicon" of Abdul Alhazred

IN A SENSE, IT IS FORTUNATE that the story I must now relate should be so largely a thing of undetermined shadows, of half-shaped hints and forbidden inferences. Otherwise, it could never be written by human hand or read by human eye. My own slight part in the hideous drama was limited to its last act; and to me its earlier scenes were merely a remote and ghastly legend. Yet, even so, the broken reflex of its unnatural horrors has crowded out in perspective the main events of normal life; has made them seem no more than frail gossamers, woven on the

dark, windy verge of some unsealed abyss, some deep, half-open chanel, wherein Earth's nethermost corruptions lurk and fester.

The legend of which I speak was familiar to me from childhood, as a theme of family whispers and head shakings, for Sir John Tremoth had been a schoolmate of my father. But I had never met Sir John, had never visited Tremoth Hall, till the time of those happenings which formed the final tragedy. My father had taken me from England to Canada when I was a small infant; he had prospered in Manitoba as an apiarist; and after his death the bee ranch had kept me too busy for years to execute a long-cherished dream of visiting my natal land and exploring its rural byways.

When, finally, I set sail, the story was pretty dim in my memory; and Tremoth Hall was no conscious part of my itinerary when I began a motorcycle tour of the English counties. In any case, I should never have been drawn to the neighborhood out of morbid curiosity, such as the frightful tale might possibly have evoked in others. My visit, as it happened, was purely accidental. I had forgotten the exact location of the place, and did not even dream that I was in its vicinity. If I had known, it seems to me that I should have turned aside, in spite of the circumstances that impelled me to seek shelter, rather than intrude upon the almost demoniacal misery of its owner.

When I came to Tremoth Hall, I had ridden all day, in early autumn, through a rolling countryside with leisurely, winding thoroughfares and lanes. The day had been fair, with skies of pale azure above noble parks that were tinged with the first amber and crimson of the following year. But toward the middle of the afternoon, a mist had come in from the hidden ocean across low hills and had closed me about with its moving phantom circle. Somehow, in that deceptive fog, I managed to lose my way, to miss the milepost that would have given me my direction to the town where I had planned to spend the ensuing night.

I went on for a while, at random, thinking that I should soon reach another crossroad. The way that I followed was little more than a rough lane and was singularly deserted. The fog had darkened and drawn closer, obliterating all horizons; but from

what I could see of it, the country was one of heath and boulders, with no sign of cultivation. I topped a level ridge and went down a long, monotonous slope as the mist continued to thicken with twilight. I thought that I was riding toward the west; but before me, in the wan dusk, there was no faintest gleaming or flare of color to betoken the drowned sunset. A dank odor that was touched with salt, like the smell of sea marshes, came to meet me.

The road turned at a sharp angle, and I seemed to be riding between downs and marshland. The night gathered with an almost unnatural quickness, as if in haste to overtake me; and I began to feel a sort of dim concern and alarm, as if I had gone astray in regions that were more dubious than an English county. The fog and twilight seemed to withhold a silent landscape of chill, deathly, disquieting mystery.

Then, to the left of my road and a little before me, I saw a light that somehow suggested a mournful and tear-dimmed eye. It shone among blurred, uncertain masses that were like trees from a ghostland wood. A nearer mass, as I approached it, was resolved into a small lodge-building, such as would guard the entrance of some estate. It was dark and apparently unoccupied. Pausing and peering, I saw the outlines of a wrought-iron gate in a hedge of untrimmed yew.

It all had a desolate and forbidding air; and I felt in my very marrow the brooding chillness that had come in from the unseen marsh in that dismal, ever-coiling fog. But the light was promise of human nearness on the lonely downs; and I might obtain shelter for the night, or at least find someone who could direct me to a town or inn.

Somewhat to my surprise, the gate was unlocked. It swung inward with a rusty grating sound, as if it had not been opened for a long time; and pushing my motorcycle before me, I followed a weed-grown drive toward the light. The rambling mass of a large manor-house disclosed itself, among trees and shrubs whose artificial forms, like the hedge of ragged yew, were assuming a wilder grotesquery than they had received from the land of the topiary.

The fog had turned into a bleak drizzle. Almost groping in the gloom, I found a dark door, at some distance from the window that gave forth the solitary light. In response to my thrice-repeated knock, I heard at length the muffled sound of slow, dragging footfalls. The door was opened with a gradualness that seemed to indicate caution or reluctance, and I saw before me an old man, bearing a lighted taper in his hand. His fingers trembled with palsy or decrepitude, and monstrous shadows flickered behind him in a dim hallway, and touched his wrinkled features as with the flitting of ominous, batlike wings.

"What do you wish, sir?" he asked. The voice, though quavering and hesitant, was far from churlish and did not suggest the attitude of suspicion and downright inhospitality which I had begun to apprehend. However, I sensed a sort of irresolution or dubiety; and as the old man listened to my account of the circumstances that had led me to knock at the lonely door, I saw that he was scrutinizing me with a keenness that belied my first impression of extreme senility.

"I knew you were a stranger in these parts," he commented, when I had finished. "But might I inquire your name, sir?"

"I am Henry Chaldane."

"Are you not the son of Mr. Arthur Chaldane?"

Somewhat mystified, I admitted the ascribed paternity.

"You resemble your father, sir. Mr. Chaldane and Sir John Tremoth were great friends, in the days before your father went to Canada. Will you not come in, sir? This is Tremoth Hall. Sir John has not been in the habit of receiving guests for a long time; but I shall tell him that you are here; and it may be that he will wish to see you."

Startled, and not altogether agreeably surprised at the discovery of my whereabouts, I followed the old man to a book-lined study whose furnishings bore evidence of luxury and neglect. Here he lit an oil lamp of antique fashion, with a dusty, painted shade, and left me alone with the dustier volumes and furniture.

I felt a queer embarrassment, a sense of actual intrusion, as I waited in the wan yellow lamplight. There came back to me the

details of the strange, horrific, half-forgotten story I had overheard from my father in childhood years.

Lady Agatha Tremoth, Sir John's wife, in the first year of their marriage, had become the victim of cataleptic seizures. The third seizure had apparently terminated in death, for she did not revive after the usual interval, and displayed all the familiar marks of the rigor mortis. Lady Agatha's body was placed in the family vaults, which were of almost fabulous age and extent, and had been excavated in the hill behind the manor-house. On the day following the interment, Sir John, troubled by a queer, insistent doubt as to the finality of the medical verdict, had reentered the vaults in time to hear a wild cry, and had found Lady Agatha sitting in her coffin. The nailed lid was lying on the stone floor, and it seemed impossible that it could have been removed by the struggles of the frail woman. However, there was no other plausible explanation, though Lady Agatha herself could throw little light on the circumstances of her strange resurrection.

Half dazed, and almost delirious, in a state of dire terror that was easily understandable, she told an incoherent tale of her experience. She did not seem to remember struggling to free herself from the coffin, but was troubled mainly by recollections of a pale, hideous, unhuman face which she had seen in the gloom on awakening from her prolonged and deathlike sleep. It was the sight of this face, stooping over her as she lay in the *open* coffin, that had caused her to cry out so wildly. The thing had vanished before Sir John's approach, fleeing swiftly to the inner vaults; and she had formed only a vague idea of its bodily appearance. She thought, however, that it was large and white, and ran like an animal on all fours, though its limbs were semihuman.

Of course, her tale was regarded as a sort of dream, or a figment of delirium induced by the awful shock of her experience, which had blotted out all recollection of its true terror. But the memory of the horrible face and figure had seemed to obsess her permanently, and was plainly fraught with

associations of mind-unhinging fear. She did not recover from her illness, but lived on in a shattered condition of brain and body; and nine months later she died, after giving birth to her first child.

Her death was a merciful thing; for the child, it seemed, was one of those appalling monsters that sometimes appear in human families. The exact nature of its abnormality was not known, though frightful and divergent rumors had purported to emanate from the doctor, nurses and servants who had seen it. Some of the latter had left Tremoth Hall and had refused to return, after a single glimpse of the monstrosity.

After Lady Agatha's death, Sir John had withdrawn from society; and little or nothing was divulged in regard to his doings or the fate of the horrible infant. People said, however, that the child was kept in a locked room with iron-barred windows, which no one but Sir John himself ever entered. The tragedy had blighted his whole life, and he had become a recluse, living alone with one or two faithful servants, and allowing his estate to decline grievously through neglect.

Doubtless, I thought, the old man who had admitted me was one of the remaining servitors. I was still reviewing the dreadful legend, still striving to recollect certain particulars that had almost passed from memory, when I heard the sound of footsteps which, from their slowness and feebleness, I took to be those of the returning manservant.

However, I was mistaken; for the person who entered was plainly Sir John Tremoth himself. The tall, slightly bent figure, the face that was lined as if by the trickling of some corrosive acid, were marked with a dignity that seemed to triumph over the double ravages of mortal sorrow and illness. Somehow—though I could have calculated his real age—I had expected an old man; but he was scarcely beyond middle life. His cadaverous pallor and feeble tottering walk were those of a man who is stricken with some fatal malady.

His manner, as he addressed me, was impeccably courteous and even gracious. But the voice was that of one to whom the

ordinary relations and actions of life had long since become meaningless and perfunctory.

"Harper tells me that you are the son of my old school friend, Arthur Chaldane," he said. "I bid you welcome to such poor hospitality as I am able to offer. I have not received guests for many years, and I fear you will find the Hall pretty dull and dismal and will think me an indifferent host. Nevertheless, you must remain, at least for the night. Harper has gone to prepare dinner for us."

"You are very kind," I replied. "I fear, however, that I am intruding. If—"

"Not at all," he countered firmly. "You must be my guest. It is miles to the nearest inn, and the fog is changing into a heavy rain. Indeed, I am glad to have you. You must tell me all about your father and yourself at dinner. In the meanwhile, I'll try to find a room for you, if you'll come with me."

He led me to the second floor of the manor-house and down a long hall with beams and panels of ancient oak. We passed several doors of bed-chambers. All were closed, and one of the doors was reenforced with iron bars, heavy and sinister as those of a dungeon cell. Inevitably I surmised that this was the chamber in which the monstrous child had been confined, and also I wondered if the abnormality still lived, after a lapse of nearly thirty years. How abysmal, how abhorrent, must have been its departure from the human type, to necessitate an immediate removal from the sight of others! And what characteristics of its further development could have rendered necessary the massive bars on an oaken door which, by itself, was strong enough to have resisted the assaults of any common man or beast?

Without even glancing at the door, my host went on, carrying a taper that scarcely shook in his feeble fingers. My curious reflections, as I followed him, were interrupted with nerve-shattering suddenness by a loud cry that seemed to issue from the barred room. The sound was a long, ever-mounting ululation, infra-bass at first like the tomb-muffled voice of a demon, and rising through abominable degrees to a shrill, ravenous fury, as if the demon had emerged by a series of

underground steps to the open air. It was neither human nor bestial, it was wholly preternatural, hellish, macabre; and I shuddered with an insupportable eeriness, that still persisted when the demon voice, after reaching its culmination, had returned by reverse degrees to a profound sepulchral silence.

Sir John had given no apparent heed to the awful sound, but had gone on with no more than his usual faltering. He had reached the end of the hall, and was pausing before the second chamber from the one with the sealed door.

"I'll let you have this room," he said. "It's just beyond the one that I occupy." He did not turn his face toward me as he spoke; and his voice was unnaturally toneless and restrained. I realized with another shudder that the chamber he had indicated as his own was adjacent to the room from which the frightful ululation had appeared to issue.

The chamber to which he now admitted me had manifestly not been used for years. The air was chill, stagnant, unwholesome, with an all-pervading mustiness; and the antique furniture had gathered the inevitable increment of dust and cobwebs. Sir John began to apologize.

"I didn't realize the condition of the room," he said. "I'll send Harper after dinner, to do a little dusting and clearing, and put fresh linen on the bed."

I protested, rather vaguely, that there was no need for him to apologize. The unhuman loneliness and decay of the old manor-house, its lustrums and decades of neglect, and the corresponding desolation of its owner, had impressed me more painfully than ever. And I dared not speculate overmuch concerning the ghastly secret of the barred chamber, and the hellish howling that still echoed in my shaken nerves. Already I regretted the singular fortuity that had drawn me to that place of evil and festering shadows. I felt an urgent desire to leave, to continue my journey even in the face of the bleak autumnal rain and wind-blown darkness. But I could think of no excuse that would be sufficiently tangible and valid. Manifestly, there was nothing to do but remain.

Our dinner was served in a dismal but stately room, by the old man whom Sir John had referred to as Harper. The meal was plain but substantial and well-cooked; and the service was impeccable. I had begun to infer that Harper was the only servant—a combination of valet, butler, housekeeper and chef.

In spite of my hunger, and the pains taken by my host to make me feel at ease, the meal was a solemn and almost funereal ceremony. I could not forget my father's story; and still less could I forget the sealed door and the baleful ululation. Whatever it was, the monstrosity still lived; and I felt a complex mingling of admiration, pity and horror as I looked at the gaunt and gallant face of Sir John Tremoth, and reflected upon the lifelong hell to which he had been condemned, and the apparent fortitude with which he had borne its unthinkable ordeals.

A bottle of excellent sherry was brought in. Over this, we sat for an hour or more. Sir John spoke at some length concerning my father, of whose death he had not previously heard; and he drew me out in regard to my own affairs with the subtle adroitness of a polished man of the world. He said little about himself, and not even by hint or implication did he refer to the tragic history which I have outlined.

Since I am rather abstemious, and did not empty my glass with much frequency, the major part of the heavy wine was consumed by my host. Toward the end, it seemed to bring out in him, a curious vein of confidentiality; and he spoke for the first time of the ill health that was all too patent in his appearance. I learned that he was subject to that most painful form of heart disease, angina pectoris, and had recently recovered from an attack of unusual severity.

"The next one will finish me," he said. "And it may come at any time—perhaps tonight." He made the announcement very simply, as if he were voicing a commonplace or venturing a prediction about the weather. Then, after a slight pause, he went on, with more emphasis and weightiness of tone:

"Maybe you'll think me queer, but I have a fixed prejudice against burial or vault interment. I want my remains to be thoroughly cremated, and have left careful directions to that end.

Harper will see to it that they are fulfilled. Fire is the cleanest and purest of the elements, and it cuts shorts all the damnable processes between death and ultimate disintegration. I can't bear the idea of some moldy, worm-infested tomb."

He continued to discourse on the subject for some time, with a singular elaboration and tenseness of manner that showed it to be a familiar theme of thought, if not an actual obsession. It seemed to possess a morbid fascination for him; and there was a painful light in his hollow, haunted eyes, and a touch of rigidity subdued hysteria in his voice, as he spoke. I remembered the interment of Lady Agatha, and her tragic resurrection, and the dim, delirious horror of the vaults that had formed an inexplicable and vaguely disturbing part of her story. It was not hard to understand Sir John's aversion to burial; but I was far from suspecting the full terror and ghastliness on which his repugnance had been founded.

Harper had disappeared after bringing the sherry; and I surmised that he had been given orders for the renovation of my room. We had now drained our last glasses; and my host had ended his peroration. The wine, which had animated him briefly, seemed to die out, and he looked more ill and haggard than ever. Pleading my own fatigue, I expressed a wish to retire; and he, with his invariable courtliness, insisted on seeing me to my chamber and making sure of my comfort, before seeking his own bed.

In the hall above, we met Harper, who was just descending from a flight of stairs that must have led to an attic or third floor. He was carrying a heavy iron pan, in which a few scraps of meat remained; and I caught an odor of pronounced gaminess, almost of virtual putrescence, from the pan as he went by. I wondered if he had been feeding the unknown monstrosity, and if perhaps its food were supplied to it through a trap in the ceiling of the barred room. The surmise was reasonable enough, but the odor of the scraps, by a train of remote, half-literary association, had begun to suggest other surmises which, it would seem, were beyond the realm of possibility and reason. Certain

evasive, incoherent hints appeared to join themselves suddenly to an atrocious and abhorrent whole. With imperfect success, I assured myself that the thing I had fancied was incredible to science; was a mere creation of superstitious diablerie. No, it could not be... here in England, of all places... that corpse-devouring demon of Arabesque tales and legends, known as the *ghoul*.

Contrary to my fears, there was no repetition of the fiendish howling as we passed the secret room. But I thought that I heard a measured crunching, such as a large animal would make in devouring its food.

My room, though still drear and dismal enough, had been cleared of its accumulated dust and matted gossamers. After a personal inspection, Sir John left me and retired to his own chamber. I was struck by his deathly pallor and weakness, as he said good night to me, and felt guiltily apprehensive that the strain of receiving and entertaining a guest might have aggravated the dire disease from which he suffered. I seemed to detect actual pain and torment beneath his careful armor of urbanity, and wondered if the urbanity had not been maintained at an excessive cost.

The fatigue of my day-long journey, together with the heavy wine I had drunk, should have conduced to early slumber. But though I lay with tightly closed lids in the darkness, I could not dismiss those evil shadows, those black and charnel larvae, that swarmed upon me from the ancient house. Insufferable and forbidden things besieged me with filthy talons, brushed me with noisome coils, as I tossed through eternal hours and lay staring at the gray square of the storm-darkened window. The dripping of the rain, the sough and moan of the wind, resolved themselves to a dread mutter of half-articulate voices that plotted against my peace and whispered loathfully of nameless secrets in demonian language.

At length, after the seeming lapse of nocturnal centuries, the tempest died away, and I no longer heard the equivocal voices. The window lightened a little in the black wall; and the terrors of

my night-long insomnia seemed to withdraw partially, but without bringing the surcease of slumber. I became aware of utter silence; and then, in the silence, of a queer, faint, disquieting sound whose cause and location baffled me for many minutes.

The sound was muffled and far off at times; then it seemed to draw near, as if it were in the next room. I began to identify it as a sort of scratching, such as would be made by the claws of an animal on solid woodwork. Sitting up in bed, and listening attentively, I realized with a fresh start of horror that it came from the direction of the barred chamber. It took on a strange resonance; then it became almost inaudible; and suddenly, for awhile, it ceased. In the interim, I heard a single groan, like that of a man in great agony or terror. I could not mistake the source of the groan, which had issued from Sir John Tremoth's room; nor was I doubtful any longer as to the causation of the scratching.

The groan was not repeated; but the damnable clawing sound began again and was continued till daybreak. Then, as if the creature that had caused the noise were wholly nocturnal in its habits, the faint, vibrant rasping ceased and was not resumed. In a state of dull, nightmarish apprehension, drugged with weariness and want of sleep, I had listened to it with intolerably straining ears. With its cessation, in the hueless, livid dawn, I slid into a deep slumber, from which the muffled and amorphous specters of the old Hall were unable to detain me any longer.

I was awakened by a loud knocking on my door—a knocking which even my sleep-confused senses could recognize the imperative and urgent. It must have been close upon midday; and feeling guilty at having overslept so egregiously, I ran to the door and opened it. The old manservant, Harper, was standing without, and his tremulous, grief-broken manner told me before he spoke that something of dire import had occurred.

"I regret to tell you, Mr. Chaldane," he quavered, "that Sir John is dead. He did not answer my knock as usual; so I made bold to enter his room. He must have died early this morning."

Inexpressibly shocked by his announcement, I recalled the single groan I had heard in the gray beginning of dawn. My host, perhaps, had been dying at that very moment. I recalled, too, the detestable nightmare scratching. Unavoidably, I wondered if the groan had been occasioned by fear as well as by physical pain. Had the strain and suspense of listening to that hideous sound brought on the final paroxysm of Sir John's malady? I could not be sure of the truth; but my brain seethed with awful and ghastly conjectures.

With the futile formalities that one employs on such occasions, I tried to condole with the aged servant, and offered him such assistance as I could in making the necessary arrangements for the disposition of his master's remains. Since there was no telephone in the house, I volunteered to find a doctor who would examine the body and sign the death certificate. The old man seemed to feel a singular relief and gratitude.

"Thank you, sir," he said fervently. Then, as if in explanation: "I don't want to leave Sir John—I promised him that I'd keep a close watch over his body." He went on to speak of Sir John's desire for cremation. It seemed that the baronet had left explicit directions for the building of a pyre of driftwood on the hill behind the Hall, the burning of his remains on this pyre, and the sowing of his ashes on the fields of the estate. These directions he had enjoined and empowered the servant to carry out as soon after death as possible. No one was to be present at the ceremony, except Harper and the hired pall bearers; and Sir John's nearer relatives—none of whom lived in the vicinity—were not to be informed of his demise till all was over.

I refused Harper's offer to prepare my breakfast, telling him that I could obtain a meal in the neighboring village. There was a strange uneasiness in his manner; and I realized, with thoughts and emotions not to be specified in this narrative, that he was anxious to begin his promised vigil beside Sir John's corpse.

It would be tedious and unnecessary to detail the funeral after noon that followed. The heavy sea fog had returned; and I

seemed to grope my way through a sodden but unreal world as I sought the nearby town. I succeeded in locating a doctor and also in securing several men to build the pyre and act as pall bearers. I was met everywhere with an odd taciturnity, and no one seemed willing to comment on Sir John's death or to speak of the dark legendry that was attached to Tremoth Hall.

Harper, to my amazement, had proposed that the cremation should take place at once. This, however, proved to be impracticable. When all the formalities and arrangements had been completed, the fog turned into a steady, everlasting downpour which rendered impossible the lighting of the pyre; and we were compelled to defer the ceremony. I had promised Harper that I should remain at the Hall till all was done; and so it was that I spent a second night beneath that roof of accursed and abominable secrets.

The darkness came on betimes. After a last visit to the village, in which I procured some sandwiches for Harper and myself in lieu of dinner, I returned to the lonely Hall. I was met by Harper on the stairs, as I ascended to the death-chamber. There was an increased agitation in his manner, as if something had happened to frighten him.

"I wonder if you'd keep me company tonight, Mr. Haldane," he said. "It's a gruesome watch that I'm asking you to share, and it may be a dangerous one. But Sir John would thank you, I am sure. If you have a weapon of any sort, it will be well to bring it with you."

It was impossible to refuse his request, and I assented at once. I was unarmed; so Harper insisted on equipping me with an antique revolver, of which he himself carried the mate.

"Look here, Harper," I said bluntly, as we followed the hall to Sir John's chamber, "what are you afraid of?"

He flinched visibly at the question and seemed unwilling to answer. Then, after a moment, he appeared to realize that frankness was necessary.

"It's the thing in the barred room," he explained. "You must have heard it, sir. We've had the care of it, Sir John and I, these

eight and twenty years; and we've always feared that it might break out. It never gave us much trouble — as long as we kept it well-fed. But for the last three nights, it has been scratching at the thick oaken wall of Sir John's chamber, which is something it never did before. Sir John thought it knew that he was going to die, and that it wanted to reach his body — being hungry for other food than we had given it. That's why we must guard him closely tonight, Mr. Chaldane. I pray to God that the wall will hold; but the thing keeps on clawing and clawing, like a demon; and I don't like the hollowness of the sound — as if the wall were getting pretty thin."

Appalled by this confirmation of my own most repugnant surmise, I could offer no rejoinder, since all comment would have been futile. With Harper's open avowal, the abnormality took on a darker and more encroaching shadow, a more potent and tyrannic menace. Willingly would I have foregone the promised vigil — but this, of course, it was impossible to do.

The bestial, diabolic scratching, louder and more frantic than before, assailed my ears as we passed the barred room. All too readily, I understood the nameless fear that had impelled the old man to request my company. The sound was inexpressibly alarming and nerve-sapping, with its grim, macabre insistence, its intimation of ghoulish hunger. It became even plainer, with a hideous, tearing vibrancy, when we entered the room of death.

During the whole course of that funeral day, I had refrained from visiting this chamber, since I am lacking in the morbid curiosity which impels many to gaze upon the dead. So it was that I beheld my host for the second and last time. Fully dressed and prepared for the pyre, he lay on the chill white bed whose heavily figured, arraslike curtains had been drawn back. The room was lit by several tall tapers, arranged on a little table in curious brazen candelabrae that were greened with antiquity; but the light seemed to afford only a doubtful, dolorous glimmering in the drear spaciousness and mortuary shadows.

Somewhat against my will, I gazed on the dead features, and averted my eyes very hastily. I was prepared for the stony pallor and rigor, but not the full betrayal of that hideous revulsion, that

inhuman terror and horror, which must have corroded the man's heart through infernal years; and which, with almost superhuman control, he had masked from the casual beholder in life. The revelation was too painful, and I could not look at him again. In a sense, it seemed that he was not dead; that he was still listening with agonized attention to the dreadful sounds that might well have served to precipitate the final attack of his malady.

There were several chairs, dating, I think, like the bed itself, from the seventeenth century. Harper and I seated ourselves near the small table and between the deathbed and the paneled wall of blackish wood from which the ceaseless clawing sound appeared to issue. In tacit silence, with drawn and cocked revolvers, we began our ghastly vigil.

As we sat and waited, I was driven to picture the unnamed monstrosity; and formless or half-formed images of charnel nightmare pursued each other in chaotic succession through my mind. An atrocious curiosity, to which I should normally have been a stranger, prompted me to question Harper; but I was restrained by an even more powerful inhibition. On his part, the old man volunteered no information or comment whatever, but watched the wall with fear-bright eyes that did not seem to waver in his palsy-nodding head.

It would be impossible to convey the unnatural tension, the macabre suspense and baleful expectation of the hours that followed. The woodwork must have been of great thickness and hardness, such as would have defied the assaults of any normal creature equipped only with talons or teeth; but in spite of such obvious arguments as these, I thought momentarily to see it crumble inward. The scratching noise went on eternally; and to my febrile fancy, it grew sharper and nearer every instant. At recurrent intervals, I seemed to hear a low, eager, doglike whining, such as a ravenous animal would make when it neared the goal of its burrowing.

Neither of us had spoken of what we should do, in case the monster should attain its objective; but there seemed to be an unvoiced agreement. However, with a supersititiousness of which I should not have believed myself capable, I began to wonder if

the monster possessed enough of humanity in its composition to be vulnerable to mere revolver bullets. To what extent would it display the traits of its unknown and fabulous paternity? I tried to convince myself that such questions and wonderings were patently absurd; but was drawn to them again and again, as if by the allurements of some forbidden gulf.

The night wore on, like the flowing of a dark, sluggish stream; and the tall, funeral tapers had burned to within an inch of their verdigris-eaten sockets. It was this circumstance alone that gave me an idea of the passage of time; for I seemed to bedrown in a black eternity, motionless beneath the crawling and seething of blind horrors. I had grown so accustomed to the clawing noise in the woodwork, and the sound had gone on so long, that I deemed its ever-growing sharpness and hollowness a mere hallucination; and so it was that the end of our vigil came without apparent warning.

Suddenly, as I stared at the wall and listened with frozen fixity, I heard a harsh, splintering sound, and saw that a narrow strip had broken loose and was hanging from the panel. Then, before I could collect myself or credit the awful witness of my senses, a large semi-circular portion of the wall collapsed in many splinters beneath the impact of some ponderous body.

Mercifully, perhaps, I have never been able to recall with any degree of distinctness the hellish thing that issued from the panel. The visual shock, by its own excess of horror, has almost blotted the details from memory. I have, however, the blurred impression of a huge, whitish, hairless and semi-quadruped body, of canine teeth in a half-human face, and long hyena nails at the end of forelimbs that were both arms and legs. A charnel stench preceded the apparition, like a breath from the den of some carrion-eating animal; and then, with a single nightmare leap, the thing was upon us.

I heard the staccato crack of Harper's revolver, sharp and vengeful in the closed room; but there was only a rusty click from my own weapon. Perhaps the cartridge was too old; any rate, it had misfired. Before I could press the trigger again, I was hurled to the floor with terrific violence, striking my head against

the heavy base of the little table. A black curtain, spangled with countless fires, appeared to fall upon me and to blot the room from sight. Then all the fires went out, and there was only darkness.

Again, slowly, I became conscious of flame and shadow; but the flame was bright and flickering, and seemed to grow ever more brilliant. Then my dull, doubtful senses were sharply revived and clarified by the acrid odor of burning cloth. The features of the room returned to vision, and I found that I was lying huddled against the overthrown table, gazing toward the deathbed. The guttering candles had been hurled to the floor. One of them was eating a slow circle of fire in the carpet beside me; and another, spreading, had ignited the bed-curtains, which were flaring swiftly upward to the great canopy. Even as I lay staring, huge, ruddy tatters of the burning fabric fell upon the bed in a dozen places, and the body of Sir John Tremoth was ringed about with starting flames.

I staggered heavily to my feet, dazed and giddy with the fall that had hurled me into oblivion. The room was empty, except for the old manservant, who lay near the door, moaning indistinctly. The door itself stood open, as if someone — or something — had gone out during my period of unconsciousness.

I turned again to the bed, with some instinctive, half-formed intention of trying to extinguish the blaze. The flames were spreading rapidly, were leaping higher, but they were not swift enough to veil from my sickened eyes the hands and features — if one could any longer call them such — of that which had been Sir John Tremoth. Of the last horror that had overtaken him, I must forbear explicit mention; and I would that I could likewise avoid the remembrance. All too tardily had the monster been frightened away by the fire. . . .

There is little more to tell. Looking back once more, as I reeled from the smoke-laden room with Harper in my arms, I saw that the bed and its canopy had become a mass of mounting flames. The unhappy baronet had found in his own death-chamber the funeral pyre for which he had longed.

It was nearly dawn when we emerged from the doomed

manorhouse. The rain had ceased, leaving a heaven lined with high and dead-gray clouds. The chill air appeared to revive the aged manservant, and he stood feebly beside me, uttering not a word, as we watched an everclimbing spire of flame that broke from the somber roof of Tremoth Hall and began to cast a sullen glare on the unkempt hedges.

In the combined light of the fireless dawn and the lurid conflagration, we both saw at our feet the semihuman, monstrous footprints, with their mark of long and ghoulish nails, that had been trodden freshly and deeply in the rainwet soil. They came from the direction of the manor-house, and ran toward the heath-clad hill that rose behind it.

Still without speaking, we followed the steps. Almost without interruption, they led to the entrance of the ancient family vaults, to the heavy iron door in the hillside that had been closed for a full generation by Sir John Tremoth's order. The door itself swung open, and we saw that its rusty chain and lock had been shattered by a strength that was more than the strength of man or beast. Then, peering within, we saw the clay-touched outline of the unreturning footprints that went downward into mausolean darkness on the stairs.

We were both weaponless, having left our revolvers behind us in the death-chamber; but we did not hesitate long. Harper possessed a liberal supply of matches; and looking about, I found a heavy billet of water-soaked wood, which might serve in lieu of a cudgel. In grim silence, with tacit determination, and forgetful of any danger, we conducted a thorough search of the well-nigh interminable vaults, striking match after match as we went on in the musty shadows.

The traces of ghoulish footsteps grew fainter as we followed them into those black recesses; and we found nothing anywhere but noisome dampness and undisturbed cobwebs and the countless coffins of the dead. The thing that we sought had vanished utterly, as if swallowed up by the subterranean walls.

At last we returned to the entrance. There, as we stood blinking in the full daylight, with gray and haggard faces, Harper spoke for the first time, saying in this slow, tremulous voice:

"Many years ago — soon after Lady Agatha's death — Sir John and I searched the vaults from end to end; but we could find no trace of the thing we suspected. Now, as then, it is useless to seek. There are mysteries which, God helping, will never be fathomed. We know only that the offspring of the vaults has gone back to the vaults. There may it remain."

Silently, in my shaken heart, I echoed his last words and his wish.



The Reckoning

Three of the five stories in our December issue (No. 30) were considered outstanding by at least one reader: the Bloch, the del Rey, and the Keller. The other two drew no "O" designations and, on the contrary were actively disliked by at least one reader. (However, Bloch has at least one enemy, too, so far as this story was concerned.)

Everyone who votes does not mention the cover, but most of you did this time, and the score sheet shows that it was approved by approximately 80% of the voters. I should like very much to have each new cover that we use taken directly from a story in the issue, or at least suggested by one, but this is something which is not feasible for us. It may happen now and then, but that is the most that I can promise.

The winning story, this time, started out in first place, and was displaced for a length of time (and number of votes) by the second-placer listed below. There was a little contest for the "show" position, but for the most part the concluder was safely ahead.

Here is how the score-sheet reads as we close the polls:

(1) *Satan's Servants*, by Robert Bloch; (2) *Cross of Fire*, by Lester del Rey; (3) *Battle of the Toads*, by David H. Keller, M.D.; (4) *Speak for Yourself*, John Quincy, by Theodore Roscoe; (5) *Harry Protagonist, Undersec for Overpop*, by Richard Wilson.

BACK BEFORE THE MOON

by S. Omar Barker

S. OMAR BARKER was a widely-published author in various of the Clayton magazines outside of fantasy and science fiction. He never appeared in WEIRD TALES, and so far as I know this was his only venture into fantasy – which is rather a shame, because this tale was well liked.

ON A LITTLE MEADOW SLOPE of the Hidden Valley (*El Valle Escondido*) that lies like a sun-smile back of the black woods of the Upper Vallecitos, stands a great cross built of red stone at the edge of the weird timber. This is in the *Rio Arriba* country of New Mexico, where all the world is still outside, and where there are said to be strange, strange sights every night of a moon for those with eyes to see them. Here, then is how the red stone cross came to be. If you had seen it you would want to know. And old Oliborio Baldonado, the graybeard, squatting in the sun beside his adobe in Canoncito, would tell you, as he told me:

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Eligio Jaramillo came riding down out of the black woods from the Valle Escondido, and all the little canons were running belly-deep in snow water to stop him. There were black bogs where the firs had hoarded great piles of winter ice only to soak up the spring trails into sucking vats that swigged and pulled at his horse's legs. The Rio itself, modest and clear-eyed in summer, boomed now through its red stone box like the wrath of *Mi Tara Dios*, and then came swinging out in a twist of muddy-watered death into the three-cornered cove where Eligio must cross it.

Ah, the reckless doom of spring in the backland wilderness of the Hidden Valley country! One day there was the silence of deep-folded snow, and the next the growl of baby torrents loping down the hills to join the roar of wild, new water out to sweep destruction down the slanting cañon and strew it in the fields below.

A great pine, tricked by a suddenly faithless earth at its spring-stirred roots, renounced the sky and came swooshing down without warning across the path of the dark horseman and his black horse struggling down out of the black woods from Valle Escondido; and in flare-eyed terror at this weird treachery of his own mountains, the pony reared and swung his mud-covered body in futile struggle back up the hill.

But Eligio's eyes widened only a second in sudden alarm. Then into their blackness came again the deeper fear that drove him wallowing in mud, like some haunted soul in despair, down the sweeping slopes of the mountains toward Vallecitos. He jerked his *caballito* back down the hill, spurred him to flounder around the fallen tree and on again down the slipping trail to the river, snaking down the steep cañon in coils ten feet deep and fifty feet from edge to edge—the river he could not hope to cross.

Yet Eligio would cross it, for it was a fear worse than a death-fear in his heart that urged him on.

Back in a squat cabin with a flat dirt roof, on a long grass slope tipped up to the sun—the lone homestead of the Hidden Valley—Erslinda lay in a fever. Erslinda, little brown-eyed sister of the angels, with the rude heart of her father so soul-bound to her own that two little tears from her eyes—*ay! que*

preciosos!—would half break it, and bring his rough brown face quivering against hers. Ers linda, at eight years already the image of *la madrecita querida*, the dear little lost mother who had left them and gone to be with her *Tata Dios*. Thus the simple love of the rude sheepman for his daughter!

Eligio had left her, dying perhaps, with her two brothers, good brown mountain lads who knew what the sheep were saying when they cried out at night, and who did not mind talking to mountains alone in the moonlight, but who must run and hide when a stranger would drop into the *Valle* from somewhere in the world.

The two good brown boys were with her; and one, Toribio, perhaps would be down on his knees asking with *Tata Dios* to leave her with them; and the other, Juanito, holding fast to her hand. And Eligio battling down through the black woods to Vallecitos, the whip of fear lashing him behind and one tiny gleam of hope to lead him: one little *cruz de Jesus*—one wooden crucifix on the altar in the *capilla* at the village. If only Padre Onesimo would give him that and he could fight back to Ers linda before the red moon would turn white over the tops of the firs and the little coyotes come out talking their queer way on the hilltops!

A doctor? Oh, yes, there was a doctor in the village, too: old Pantureaux with his black bag and half-white whiskers. Eligio would see him for medicine, but, after all, what could one hope from a mere *medico* in such a case?

Three days ago, Toribio had come crying to the cabin, and sure enough when Eligio went out with him, there was old Chango, the biggest goat, standing on a stump inside the *fuerte-coral*, upright like a man and preaching to the flock.

They could hear strange words past understanding and when Chango saw them coming there was a sudden red-fire circle around him, and as it died away the old goat leaped down among the herd, saying “ba-a” in his own language again. A puff of heat came blowing past their ears that could have only been the breath of the very devil.

That night Juanito saw a great wolf go flying out of the

trees the way a lost soul would fly, for when he came against the white moon there was blue fire in his mouth and he dropped down suddenly and stood howling on a rock at the top of the hill.

Thus the weird doom of a haunted springtime up in the Valle! When that night was halfway into dawn, two coyotes, slim wolf brothers of *el Demonio*, sat on a hill and set up a mad fandango to drive back the sun, and over across the valley one answered like a call from another world. Eligio knew the Voice, and it said: "Erslinda, Er-rs-li-i-in-da!" over and over. As he lay like a dead man listening he heard the little brown daughter moan softly in her sleep, but when he muttered a swift *Ave Maria* she was silent again; and outside the two coyotes went *yip-yirr-uping* back into the woods.

That morning Erslinda arose a little quieter, yet well and clear-faced as ever; but one mother goat was dead on her knees in the *fuerte*, and when the brown boys had milked the others and Erslinda drank some of it, moon whiteness came over her face and the fever began to take her. Juanito looked in her cup and sure enough, there, for a second, was the outline of a face marked in blue pinpoint bubbles of milk.

It was a devil's spring and a devil's fever that had come to the Valle Escondido, and Eligio Jaramillo came riding down out of the black hills for that little token of *Nuestro Salvador* that would save his daughter—if not from death, at least from the *Diablo* who would take her soul away. Three weeks before, he had gone up with Erslinda and the two brown boys and a few goats over the frozen snow and winter-dead river, making ready for summer until the mad water should all have run out of the hills and he could bring his sheep up for the new grass. But now he must leave the Valle and battle down to Vallecitos for the cross that had cured Macario Romero of the fever and saved Jose Adan that time of a doomed spring in the Valle Alamoso.

The Rio was a monster across his path. It swished down the cañon in a current so swift that every wave arched its back and leaped to keep up with its fellows like *un lobo* anxious to be in at

the killing. The muddy rider knew it would be death, and yet, with the talking sounds of the hills behind him and the great fear in his heart, he urged the black horse to its edge. Black Choto groaned, but stepped into the torrent, for he knew his master. Two steps brought his head into the waves. The horse knew death when he saw it, and he saw it then. Yet not so close but that a lunge and a mad pawing of water brought him streaming and quaking back to the bank. Eligio's heart was a second without beating, for he knew poor Choto could not carry him across.

Yet he would cross. Twenty steps above, where the mad water came tearing out of the box cañon, it was narrower, and at the edge of the bank, the curled fingers of the flood clutched at the roots of a tall blue *pinoreal*. If he had an ax he could chop it, and it might swish down and catch on the other bank, for it was long enough. But Eligio had left the Valley half in stupor from the dread in his soul and had not been foreminded. He tried pushing the tree. It swayed a little, for the water had loosened its roots, but it did not fall. A dozen little *piedritas* and a single block of black earth where he had disturbed the anchor of the tree tumbled into the stream, *y no mas*.

The black horse stood like a slim statue back a bit from the bank, and Eligio looked at him without hope. Then suddenly he was at the saddle, unbuckling the lasso that always hung there. It was a long rope, light and tough and made of *maguey Mejicano*, the way the cowboys like. Eligio could throw it, too, with a swish that would fetch up whatever he caught in a quick surprise.

Now it was no running horse he must rope, but the snag root of a big log lying like clusters of dead snakes across the Rio. He threw with all his might and the slim string of *maguey* kirtled clear across the water, though it did not catch. But it was long enough. It dropped down into the water and dragged off down the stream, but Eligio pulled it to him with swift hands and a spark of *esperanza* came into his heart. For now he would cross the river. It remained for him but to throw the rope swiftly and surely.

And he did. The third time the questing loop caught on a

stout snag and held when the middle bellied to a strong tug of the mad water. He tied Black Choto to a bush back from the bank to await his return with *la cruz salvadora* ere the moon would be rising. Then into the water he crept, knotting his hands in the rope and fighting that giant a thousand times his strength with the muscles of a strong little man and the heart of a *leon*.

Eligio had come down out of the black woods where a *Lobo-Diablo* had flown across the moon, and he was going down to Vallecitos for a Cross of Jesus to save the child that was his other heart, and he had crossed the Rio because he must!

One step on the bank in safety and he heard the soft sound of a *woo-oooh!* behind him like the blue fire-wolf that had come down from the moon to sit and howl on the hillside, but when he looked back, half in terror, it was the tall blue fir that was swaying down over the river. It came down slowly to rest its stiff upper branches on a gray boulder across the Rio so that its trunk was a stout-bristled bridge over the reaching water that any man might cross. If the tired wet man had only waited—

But now he was over, nevertheless. With the coiled rope around his dripping shoulder he was on his way down the wild-curved road to the *placita*. Now he would run in the swigging mud the few miles distance to the *capilla*, and he would be back across the fir-tree bridge before the moon! *Jesus adorado!*

Eligio ran like the cursing old river itself, for here there had been more sun on the road. But even as he went, dodging the black bog holes and talking a heart prayer to the good Jesus, there was a voice that muttered in the little cañons and a soft sound of doom in the warm-lipped wind; and the black hills talked behind him.

It was where the slanting road comes down by the river and a helpless old trail from the Rio del Espiritu Santo crawls to the west edge of the water, that his tired legs pulled him down to rest for a double breath lest he fall dead in the black mud. And it was when he dropped his head in his leathered hands for a dead still moment that he heard the voice that called from over the Rio. "*Amigo! Amigo!*"

It was a strange sound. Eligio looked in wonder, for who would be calling from the old trail? Ah, what would the poor sheepman see? Leaning against the white stump of a *troncon*, holding himself up with his arms out on two branches as though he might be a Christ on the Cross was a long-haired man with a curly brown beard on his face, and the black woods behind him. Eligio had not yet closed his mouth from surprise when the man stepped down to the brink of that rabid water and called again.

"*Amigo!* Friend! Help me to cross this water! I cannot pass it alone!"

Eligio saw that there was the stain of red, like blood, on his blue rag jacket and remembered how he had heard of the old hermit digger of mines back in the red stone hills of the *Espiritu Santo*, who was like to be standing on his head half of the day because of the crazy way it was.

So Eligio called to him that he could not cross that torrent, worse here than above. For it was only the crazy miner, and Eligio must be running on down the road to the village.

"Your rope! Throw me your rope!" the old man called out now, more insistently.

But Eligio was going again and would leave him there, for who would stop to help an old fool drown? He looked back over his shoulder and his heart stopped for a second with his legs. The old man was wading in, arms over his head. He would be lost!

Let him drown! Eligio had battled the clutching hills to come down this far for the *cruz de Jesus*, and he must go on. But it was in his heart now as if there were only one world and one man in it, and he the crazy old man wading out to go down dead in the flood.

The hawk does not flick his wing more quickly than Eligio pulled the rope coils from his shoulder, ran back and whistled the strong *maguety* string across the mad water.

The line looped over the old man, and when he went strangling down under the flood the *borreguero* Eligio caught the rope a turn around a stout white aspen and pulled him up again! It was one *hombrecito* against the whole weight of another and the long-muscle water besides, and there was death in it for one

or both if he should slip, for he had the rope wound about his hand and arm like a snake.

Here was another struggle with the roaring Rio, and the sun crawling around the west to make long, black shadows of the firs! Eligio pulled and hauled and cursed like *un loco enojado*, and the old *minero* gurgled and fought the water and then went dead on the rope until a whirl caught and swung him past the middle. Eligio pulled him out on the bank like a great dead *trucha*. But the old man was not dead.

There were two long, lost hours the sheepman was working with him until he stood up again, and now he would be too late getting back to Ers linda! He tried to run on now, but the *minero* plucked him by the sleeve and said, like one who would know already: "Where do you go, my friend, and why do I see shadows like the black woods in your eyes?"

Ah, Eligio would hurry away, but now he must stay and tell him what he asked, for there was no end to the look in his eyes. So he did tell him, even how Chango had preached to the flock up in the Valle and how he had come fighting across the river.

The *minero* gave him a look like the look of a clear blue sky and said: "Who shall say that the little roots are only for the growing of wild grass? Or that uphill is not down to the one who understands?"

Even before he had finished, Eligio was off again down the rough *camino* to the village . . . late . . . late, but with half the fear shadow gone from his black eyes, and he not knowing why.

At the beginning of evening Eligio came over the last hill with the gray sage clumps about him, to look upon the village down by the river where he should find the chapel and the Holy Crucifix.

The black doom came rushing back into his heart when he looked, for the long digging arms of the crowding water had crept out and clutched the old chapel, and the baked mud that was its walls crumbling like dead faith into the flood. As he ran crying down the hill the last front wall with the great cross upon it tumbled to the *embrazada del agua*, and all the God-fearing people of Vallecitos stood groaning and watching it. . . . All but

the good Padre Onesimo, for his body was bumping somewhere down the river and his soul flying up to his *Tata Dios*.

Eligio Jaramillo had come down out of the black woods of talking wolves for the *cruz de Jesus* to save his daughter, but the black water he had fought was there before him. Even the good Padre who might have known the holy words to say for making another cross was gone.

Eligio was taking back a useless medicine from old Pantureaux, now, yet without hope, for how would a little red bottle or white pellets save the girl when there was blue fire in the mouth of a wolf flying across the moon? Now he must go back through the black woods to bury his dead, and his heart under the black earth with her, for he had lost two hours fighting the river for a crazy digger of mines, and the avenging water had been that long before him at the *capilla*.

There was only one word in the woods as he climbed back again toward the Valle, and that was the shouting word of the river in the canon. Eligio crossed the fir-tree bridge that had fallen for him. The water was singing a wild song beneath him. Now he would step down to die in it, but he must not, for the dead must be buried.

Black Choto was there by the foot of the hill with a strange, joyful voice welcoming his master. His master had no ears for the sound of a poor horse's gladness.

It was slow up the mountain. The moon was white and going west over the black firs when Eligio topped the hill where the little coyotes should be out talking their queer weird way in the night time. But they were not. There was no voice in the woods. Ah, the poor sheepman understood this silence of death in the Valle! For, why should a devil-wolf be howling now that Eligio was coming back with empty hands—too late?

When he rode into the Valle with the flat back cabin up on the *solana* of it, there was a cry from the marsh by the road and when Eligio looked, it was the old *minero* again, deep in a bank of the melting snow of spring and calling:

"*Amigo!* Friend! Your rope! Throw me your rope!"

Eligio would kill him now, for his heart was black with

grief. Yet he did not. Again it was in his heart as if there was but one world and one man in it, and he the old man dying there in the moonlit snow; and he looped him again with the *maguey* string he could throw that sure way, and pulled him out flat where the snow was hard.

But he did not raise him up, for now he must ride on up the hill to kiss the dead lips of his Erslinda. *Ay! Jesus!*

It was the boy Toribio who ran out in a swift patter when Eligio came to the cabin, but it was Erslinda, brown little sister of the angels, that stood in the light of the open door and called to him, her voice singing into his poor heart like the joy of a day that never was.

How could the man listen to his good brown boy telling him something until Erslinda was in his arms and her brown face against his? For they must tell him how a strange miner man with a beard, and with the look of the blue joy in his eyes and red stone stains like blood on his jacket, had come wordless into the cabin, with queer grasses on his brow.

And when Erslinda drank the red drink he brought for her from beneath his jacket the fever left her, and they, falling on their knees at her bed did not see the stranger leave.

It was in a quiet moonlight that Eligio Jaramillo went quickly searching down the valley for the *minero* he had left lying on the snow. But there was only the print where his clothes had stained the snow like a blood-red cross, to be found.

Ah, the holy calm that follows springtime where Eligio Jaramillo has built a red stone cross in the *Valle Escondido* and the little coyotes go walking their queer quiet way in the night!



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THE ROAD TO NOWHERE

by Robert A. W. Lowndes

(author of *Leapers*, *Lilies*, etc.)

After one has read fantasy or science fiction in the regular magazines for awhile, you notice that certain themes keep recurring and eventually become very stale. Back in the 30s, a number of themes were done to death rather early, but this did not stop authors from continuing to write stories on them, and pretty much in the same way, too. When I started writing myself, there was a time when I very deliberately picked the stalest, most worn-out themes and plots I could recall and set out to see if I could breathe new life into them. In a sense, I was doing this because I wanted to see the dry bones live again, and no one else was doing it at that time. In some instances, some readers were kind enough to say that I'd succeeded. But whether the present tale is an example, I'll have to leave up to you.

HE CAME UP THE SIDEWALK by the little iron railing that separates the al fresco section of Il Bambino's, at 12th and University Place, paused and looked at me sitting alone there at one of the tables, as if he thought he recognized me, but was not entirely sure. I looked up from my gibson and smiled slightly,

An earlier and shorter version of this story was published as *Highway*, in the Fall 1942 issue of SCIENCE FICTION QUARTERLY, under the pseudonym of Wilfred Owen Morley.

wondering if I had seen him before. If I had, I didn't remember, but I'd rather risk an error than unintentionally snub someone. Then he said, "Excuse me, sir, but aren't you Robert Lowndes, science fiction author?"

I don't like being called "Robert", although it's nice to see my name in print, when the initials are there where they belong. However, I nodded and said, "Yes. I've had some science fiction published, but most of my work in the field has been editing."

He asked if I were expecting someone, and finding how it was, inquired if he might join me. He wanted to tell me a story—perhaps I could use it. He'd cheerfully pick up the tab if I'd just listen and hear him out.

I judged him to be a little older than myself, though in far better condition; his voice was pleasant-sounding, and his person neat without being ostentatious about it. He had something of the look of an outdoor man, but his hands weren't calloused, which I noticed when he introduced himself as Richard Barlow, and we shook. His eyes were a sort of washed-out blue, and his clean-shaven face no more lined than my own. He ordered a gibbon, too, and while we waited, we tried without success to determine where he might have seen me or a picture, and identified me as a science fiction author. Photographs of me are rather rare in science fiction, but my picture has appeared several times in another magazine I edit. We finally agreed that he might have seen that, as he had seen my other magazines, and *EXPLORING THE UNKNOWN* is advertised in them once in a while.

"That's an occult and psychic magazine, isn't it," he asked. "I think I looked through a copy once in a back issue store when I was looking for something else . . . Yes, I did, because I saw your name there and then found it in a science fiction magazine later."

I mentioned that I was now almost entirely involved with weird, horror, terror, and mystery so far as fiction went, and he said that the story he wanted to tell me had some of these elements in it. *Il Bambino's* genial host came out and greeted me

and my companion warmly, as he always does; then the waiter arrived with our drinks, and he said he might as well start.

I always listen when someone wants to tell me a story which he's sure will be interesting and something I'll want to write up — that "he" embraces both male and female, though I'm oldfashioned and only embrace females — but the fact is that such material is rarely of any use to me. Generally, it isn't even interesting, although once in a while there's some little side bit that I find I can use in an entirely different story. But there was one thing refreshingly different about Richard Barlow: he didn't appear at all eager and enthusiastic; and another thing, even better — he didn't take the this-is-terrific-and-we-can-make-a-barrel-of-money line.

The day was on the hot side, and I was there somewhat earlier than usual since I was taking it off, as one of my single-day vacation spots that I use to make up one week during the summer. It wasn't exactly a bright day, though, as the sun was peering out from clouds only once in a while. He looked up at the sky for a moment, cleared his throat, then said that it all started back in 1940, and he'd tell it like a real printed story. You'll see later, if you do not see right away, why I was fascinated from the very first; but I just want to say that I've put down his opening very close to the way he gave it, and I didn't take any notes. That is for the same reason as my fascination.

* * *

"It was just about a year ago today," said Harvey, "that the three fools from nowhere came to see me about the Stamphis highway."

"From nowhere?" I objected.

The ex-Selectman filled his pipe and rocked gently, as we sat out on his back porch, overlooking the hollyhocks. "How many ways do you suppose there are of getting into town, Rick?"

"Well, first of all, the orthodox ones: train, bus, private car."

He shook his head as he took my proffered matches, and urged me to shift my rocker a bit and stop wasting energy

rocking against the grain. "Nope. There's always someone on hand at both the railway station and bus terminal. No one saw them get off a train or a bus, and the fools were impressive to look at. If you'd seen them, you'd know what I mean — anyone who saw them would have talked about it."

I assured him that rocking with the grain did feel better, enjoying a brief hypocrisy, and suggested that this was ex-post-facto. He couldn't have known at the time he saw them, and what about private cars?

Harvey puffed on his pipe and looked contemplative. "That was the first thing we thought of, of course. They didn't look like gentlemen who would travel any other way than with a chauffeur of their own. But all that week, Peabody and his crew and Jem White and his crew were at either end of town with the Japanese Beetle brigade. They had every entrance to town plastered with signs, and every car was stopped. They couldn't have failed to notice such distinguished-looking gentlemen, even if one of them was driving himself. Besides that, the car would have to be parked, and Patrolman Denny would have noticed any strange vehicle, because there were so few at that time."

"Well," I said, "couldn't they have come at night?"

"Then the town patrol would have spotted them. The boys don't get offensive, but they check up on every car on the highway going through after dark. We aren't taking any chances on fifth columnists, no sir. Besides, if they came at night, they'd have to stay somewhere — wouldn't sleep in their car. And no stranger can stay anywhere overnight here without registering somehow. The fools said they were from Stamphis, but no one either registered from Stamphis or corresponded to the description of any of the three fools at any of the overnight places in town, or at the hotel. We made a full inquiry."

I sighed, waved a bumblebee away gently, and decided that the best thing to do was to try to get Harvey back on to the main story. "What about the Stamphis highway?" I asked, deliberately suppressing the question I most wanted to ask.

"They were philanthropists, or so they said. Soon's I heard that word, I thought to myself that they were probably

confidence men." Harvey nodded with satisfaction, patted his paunch and puffed for a moment. "Ever hear of a philanthropist yet who didn't have something up his sleeve?"

I allowed that I hadn't.

"No such animal, Rick. Well . . . they came to see me, showed credentials and what not. It all looked in perfect order, you understand."

"What were they like?" I interrupted.

"Distinguished looking . . . Hmm, I've said that before, but that's the key phrase. They gave you the feeling that you must have heard of them before, must have seen their pictures and read about them, because it just didn't seem possible at all that you could have kept up with the times and not seen their pictures in the papers and read about the important things they'd done. Gave me an uneasy feeling, it did, because I felt sure that I ought to know who they were and it was embarrassing to have to pretend when I didn't at all. Good, sound American names, too."

"Did they look like foreigners?"

"Not in the least. You couldn't ask for more clean-cut spruce-looking all-the-way-through, Americans. The main one was in his 40s, I'd say. Very polite, friendly — it's hard to believe that they were such fools."

I crushed my cigaret stub into the ashtray and sighed. It's no use trying to get Harvey to hurry, or to tell something in any way but his own. And if you want to hear the whole story, it's fatal to start arguing before he's decided that he's finished telling it.

"Maybe you'll remember that the highway department here was in something of a mess around that time," he said. "Jenkins had been sent up for embezzlement, it was an election year, and we were all in a bad way. That Man was sure to run for a third term and no one was going to stop him; he'd carry all his party's candidates in town here along with him, unless we could do something valuable before the election.

"Well, politically speaking, those fools were a godsend, coming up with their proposition in July. What they wanted was the town's permission to replace the existing road with a four-lane highway to Stamphis. They would bear the costs, and

work it in such a way that the town administration could get the credit for it. They'd set up a corporation and put a toll bridge across the swamp, which would reimburse them in time, they said. The one thing they wanted especial permission for was this swamp road, in addition to the four-lane highway to Stamphis.

"We'd been considering bridging the swamp for a long time, seeing as how it cost so much every few years to replace roads running through there, but saw no way of going through with it. And you know what would have happened to any Selectman who suggested getting financial aid from That Man's government."

I nodded. I knew very well what would have happened, as a black sheep brother of mine had committed political suicide by trying that sort of thing in another state.

Harvey re-lit his pipe. "No need to go through all the ins-and-outs. We managed to get the deal approved by the town meeting — the fools made large deposits in the bank with certified checks drawn on a bank in New York — and the arrangement was concluded; they started to work on the highway, using local help as had been guaranteed.

"There was just one bit of trouble from the very first. They kept on talking about the *Stamphis* highway. Have you ever heard of a place in this state called *Stamphis*?"

I gave Harvey a look of pure joy. "No."

"Neither had any of us, Rick. We were just as friendly as we could be to those fools on a hot day in July, and we didn't want to look like fools ourselves, but the fact is that no one in the department had ever heard of Stamphis. You know, just a little thing can queer a deal — a little thing like that — and we were in a quandry.

"Well, my assistant — you remember Jeffrey; he's in officers' training school now; thinks we'll find ourselves in the war pretty soon, could be right — got around that. He brought in his cousin, who was visiting him at the time — called him up from the next room and cued him in — and, seemingly just as a bit of hospitality introduced him to the fools. The cousin — Stewart? — no, I think it was Seward . . . well, something like that . . . had

never been out here before, so through him we got a chance to ask the fools where Stamphis was, without losing face."

"Where was it?" I asked in what I hoped was a moderate tone of voice.

"Oh, they showed him. One of them took out a map, smiling and wagged his finger at him, making snide remarks about our typical brand of humor — nothing offensive, mind you. He opened the map and showed us our town, then drew a pencil line across to Stamphis.

"Jeffrey's cousin spoke up at that point. 'But that's where Waterloo ought to be,' he said. 'I've never been out here before myself, but a friend of mine has and he told me he had some trouble in Waterloo. And I'm pretty sure it was just about there.' The rest of us held our breaths. Stew - Sew - ah, that's the name: Stewart Sewell — might have set off an unpleasant situation; we hadn't intended to contradict the fools.

"But it didn't. The fools were wonderful diplomats. Before anything unpleasant could happen, they urged that we drive out with them to Stamphis and continue exploring the proposition as their guests."

He puffed away on his pipe meditatively. "And, you know, when we all went outside, there was a fancy car with a chauffeur parked in front of the building. Young Sewell had other business, which is just as well as there was just room for five of us to ride comfortably.

"I guess that the only way I can explain it is that a lot of people sometimes get touched for a spell. We'd *all* forgotten that there was such a place as Stamphis."

"Was there anything particularly odd about your visitors?" I asked.

"Yes, now that you mention it. I'm not too sure — it could have been my eyes — but Stew Sewell noticed it too. When we came out, it was high noon and the sun was very bright. Their shadows seemed to flicker. I noticed it as we were about to get into the car. But half an hour later, there was nothing wrong about them, and I never saw that flicker again."

The telephone rang just then, and Harvey heaved himself out

of his chair and went inside. He came back a couple of minutes later. "That was Buckley," he said as if this explained everything needful at the moment. "Oh, that reminds me. Arlene rang me up just before you got here. Wants you to bring back some ant powder. How much longer will you two be here — all summer?"

"No, I'm afraid not — only until the end of the month, and then it's back to the Turkish Bath known as the streets of New York. Though I'm not too sorry."

"Don't care much for the country, eh?"

"Not for full summers, unless there are beaches and salt water nearby. But what about Stamphis?"

"It was there, all right. Not a bad-looking little town at all — and not too different from what we seemed to remember of Waterloo. A bit more neatly laid out, a little nicer-looking buildings and more tasteful homes.

"New?"

"Some of it, of course. That's just natural. But it was established a long time ago — just after the Civil War."

I shook my head. "Harvey, that's just impossible. Your friend Stewart Seward said a friend of his had had trouble in Waterloo not too long ago. Well, so did I. I was on the way back from Chicago, year before last, and had to stop in for repairs at a garage in Waterloo. It took them all day to do a two-hour job."

Harvey lit his pipe. "You and Arlene came over that four-lane highway, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'm just telling you how it happened to be built. The fools made good on their bargain, so we have a highway, and a bridge across the swamp we wouldn't have had otherwise.

"But they never made any money, and they must have lost thousands on that side road — the one that goes *through* the swamp."

"Huh?"

"Remember passing a side road on your way here, one with 'Road Closed' signs up?"

I pondered for a moment. "Yes, now that you mention it."

"Well, that's it. The bridge *across* the swamp is part of the

deal they made, part of the new highway. They've been collecting tolls — you paid some — but it'll take a hundred years at the rate they're going to get their money back, let alone show a profit. And running a road *through* the swamp — only a fool would think of it. They built it for about fifteen miles and then gave up. That's why the road is closed — it doesn't lead anywhere; just comes to a dead stop all of a sudden, and there you are, about ten miles from Stamphis, and nothing but swamp ahead of you."

"But who would do a thing like that?"

"You see," Harvey replied, "it's just as I said. They already had a fine highway to Stamphis, so another road leading to the same place was pointless. They were fools. We got all the benefit of the deal and they got nothing but a road to nowhere."

* * *

Our waiter came then, and we had our empty glass replenished and put in an order for the green noodle special (so it may have been a Thursday). I grinned at my visitor. "Very interesting, so far," I said. "I like the story. I like it very much. In fact, I like it so much that I wrote it myself twenty five years ago. You've made a few slight changes, and they're rather good ones, but you've been telling me my own story. The next part is an account of how you met Arlene, right?"

He grinned back at me. "You were off about that," he replied. "Last month, I was in a second hand magazine store, looking for something interesting but not too profound to read on the train. There was a copy of something called the *Avon Science Fiction Reader*, so I picked it up. And about half an hour later I came upon a story by Mr. Robert W. Lowndes; the title was *Highway*. I nearly fell out of my seat when I read the first sentence."

I chuckled. "Do you know how that story got to be written? Some friends and I — including Don Wollheim, who edited that collection — drove out to the second World Science Fiction Convention at Chicago in 1940. We had an accident the first day; the car turned over. Just went smash on its side. People helped us, put the car back on its wheels, and we drove off; no one was hurt, except that I got a small cut just over my eye. But the body

was a wreck and all the windows were gone, as well as the windshield. It became very amusing the next day when it started to rain.

"On the way back, we stopped in a garage in Waterloo, to have a new body put on. It took them all day, but most of the time they were just sitting around loafing. So I had my revenge on Waterloo in that story."

"So that's it," he said. "I wondered why you picked a town in Indiana, figured maybe you were just mixing fact with fiction a bit. But I figured I'd tell you my story, starting out with the variations you put in."

"It wasn't Indiana. It was New Hampshire. No point in mentioning what the original name of the town was — but it wasn't Waterloo. How did you hit on the name 'Stamphis'?"

"That was Dick Wilson's whimsy for Stamford, Connecticut. Perhaps you've read some of his stories. Richard Wilson is a well-known writer now."

He shook his head. "Can't say that I have. I don't read much science fiction as a rule. But just the same, that story you wrote back then is essentially about me. It wasn't Stamphis, either — but what hit me was that you did pick the right name of the town at the end of the story. And what's more — I know because I started looking for your magazines after that — I came across one with another story of yours, where you also mention the town: Dorcax. . . . Want me to go on?"

"Sure," I said. "But I think 'Dorcax' is a Wilson invention, too."

"Well," he said, "we'll have to go back to 1938 for a bit. I was unemployed then, with a Master's degree in history. But there's something that has to be put in right here. I had some sort of accident, and while all the doctors agree that there's nothing wrong with me otherwise, I can't remember a thing about my past earlier than 1938. I know what I know, what I must have learned up to that time. But there are no specific memories, nothing personal — just general information in my head. So I don't remember a black sheep brother."

"I remember sitting on a park bench in New York City and

seeing a want ad for an assistant to a publisher; a degree in history was required. The paper was two days old, but I figured all I'd lose was carfare and I had a little money. What I'd say if I were asked *where* I got my degree, I didn't know. All I knew was that I had it.

"I got the job. No one asked me about my college or graduate school; they just took my word for it. I say 'they', but it was really just one man. He was starting out with a line of history and education books. Very interesting. The history books were the debunking kind that you saw in the middle thirties, and the education books were of the ultra 'progressive' sort. People who read the history books would get the impression that the great Americans they read about in school were a pretty unsavory lot, or at best ridiculous — and I don't need to tell you what has happened with education. But I didn't see then what it was all leading to, and neither did anyone else.

"The man who started the firm I was working for — it was just starting then — sold out to another, bigger publisher after a few years. I left to go into service in 1942, before this happened. But in 1940 I was still working for him, and making good money.

"I just want to say that there was one paragraph you had about Arlene that was right; you said that I never did ask her much of anything about her past, nor she about mine. But that comes later. I didn't meet her in a movie theater, though; she was the secretary where I worked."

Somehow I felt deflated. I suppose other writers have had an experience at least something like this; anyway, it was fun to go along with, and I wanted to hear Barlow out and see just how accurate my clairvoyant fiction was supposed to be. He took a sip of his gibson, and continued.

* * *

Arlene insisted upon our driving to Dorcax — remember, now, that Stamphis no longer has any part in this story — that evening, after I told her what Harvey had told me.

"It's been a long time since I was there," she sighed as I slid behind the wheel. "And I've neglected Grandfather Wheeler terribly."

I looked at her. It's strange, I thought, how seldom Arlene made any references to the past, and this was the first time she'd ever mentioned living relatives. As if she'd read my mind, she said, "Gramp Wheeler isn't my grandfather, Rick. That's just what everyone calls him."

I turned my attention back to the road, because there was a big curve ahead. In a moment, I saw why. A side road led straight ahead; there were big "Road Closed" signs there. Of course, this was the road that led fifteen miles into the swamp, then came to a stop.

"Why do you think they built that?" I asked Arlene.

"Maybe their money ran out — or something happened to make them stop."

"But why would they attempt it in the first place. The project itself doesn't make sense."

I remembered other things Harvey had told me. They'd gone ahead with remaking the old road, all right. No kick there. But something gave one the impression, Harvey said, that it was the swamp road where their interests really lay and that the main road was just an auxiliary project. Yet, the work on the main road was meticulous, and was much better done than anyone who knew the ins and outs of politics and construction would have expected.

Why? Why, if their main idea was to build a road through the swamp, did they bother with a not-too-necessary project like re-making an old road into a highway? In fact, and the thought struck me suddenly, if the swamp road had been completed, then this highway we were riding along now would have been superfluous.

No matter how I looked at it, it all became more mystifying. They'd built the toll bridge where the old road had cut across the narrower neck of the swamp; but the only conclusion I could come to was that they never intended to finish the swamp road at all. It had been planned that way — to be unfinished and unused.

Beside me, Arlene hummed gaily. "Slow down, pet; they enforce speed laws here."

I shot a glance at her. "Darling, are you a native of Dorcax?"

She stretched lazily. "It's nice, but I've only visited there."

"But — look, have you ever noticed anything unusual about the people?" I hadn't mentioned what Harvey had said about the flickering shadows. And for some reason, I remembered an eccentricity of my one-time employer, Leonard White: In all the time I worked for him, I never knew him to go out in bright, midday sunlight. He'd have lunch sent in, between twelve and two — or wait until after two to go out.

"No — nothing unusual. Turn left here and slow down. It's easy to miss the house."

Gramp Wheeler was a fascinating character, but you know, that was exactly the impression I got of him — a character, someone out of a play or book or radio script. He told Bunyanesque stories about fearsome critters of field and forest — some of which I suspect were invented that very moment, and was apparently official town historian. He brought out his album of clippings from the *Dorcax Independent*, a seven-volume file that went back to 1868. I couldn't see much difference between these and the sort of material you're likely to find in other small town newspapers. The one thing of interest, perhaps, was that the *Independent* had been owned and operated by the same family since its inception, and even that isn't too unusual.

We walked around town a bit — Gramp wanted to show me everything, since I hadn't been there before. You know, it was all familiar in a strange sort of way. Not a single thing about Dorcax gave me the impression that this was unique, this was Dorcax and no other place. It was all a copy of other towns, no one town in particular, and slightly different arrangements — but a copy: houses, layout of streets, newspaper, stores, official buildings, and what Gramp had to say about the political situation. Even the people were replicas of people I'd seen elsewhere — not people I'd known, but people I'd seen. Everyone gave me the impression that I'd seen that person somewhere else before.

And I hadn't forgotten that this was exactly where Haverhill, Maine, was supposed to be — just across the border.

In fact, for all his general charm and gracious hospitality,

Gramp Wheeler seemed to have one definite purpose in entertaining us: to impress us with the fact that the town of Dorcax had been in existence, on this site, since 1865 — before then, it had been a village.

And no one I spoke to — for Gramp introduced us to a few of the townsfolk — had ever heard of Haverhill.

The next day I started in on my campaign. First of all, there was the matter of road maps. I drove across into Maine, collecting maps at every gas station I passed, then cut back into New Hampshire on a different route. And on the way back to New York, I did the same thing; we had quite a collection when I got back — but I'm getting ahead of my story. Well . . . what examining the full collection did was only to confirm what I found in the assortment I picked up in Maine and New Hampshire.

Not one of these road maps showed any such place as Haverhill, Maine; not one listed it. They all indicated and listed Dorcax. But going through the trunk of the car, I came across an old map from 1939 — that was the first time Arlene and I had spent a vacation up this way — and this one showed Haverhill and listed it, exactly where Dorcax was now supposed to be.

If you'll forgive me, I think I'll keep ahead a bit and tell you how I followed through on this. I checked up through the post office — wrote to Washington — and got a reply from some official with very complete data from ancient files. Yes, Dorcax obtained its post office in 1865, just as Gramp Wheeler had claimed. There was no post office in Haverhill, Maine; and in fact, the person who answered my inquiry asserted that no such place existed. He was, himself, a native of Dorcax and knew the state of Maine thoroughly.

A carefully worded letter to the State Senator, whom I had met in 1939, elicited a reply to the fact that he had spent many happy days in Dorcax, and was I joking about this town of Haverhill?

And up in my closet at home, in our New York City apartment, I found an Augusta newspaper dated 1937 — I'd bought it in a second hand store in Connecticut for an amusing

interview relating to Edward VIII's abdication; it carried Haverhill credit lines on a couple of minor stories.

So I started another campaign, checking up on almanacs and gazeteers. The results convinced me I was not insane, but that something strange and perhaps very unpleasant really was afoot. First of all, the almanacs and gazeteers (I collected them in those days) I had bought at the time of their appearance, between 1938 and 1940, all listed Haverhill. 1940 found Dorcax listed instead, in most of them — the ones I had bought at newsstands or bookstores. But ones I ordered *through* the publishers directly — ones I'd missed or hadn't seen on sale — all listed Dorcax, regardless of the date on them. I might add that my collection had been pushed back to 1930 by that time.

But to get back to the right now of it, right now I was here in this New Hampshire town just across the border from Dorcax, and there was only this one road map which showed Haverhill in the place where all the later maps showed Dorcax.

* * *

We paused to start attacking the green noodles, which arrived at this point. "Well," I said, "so far you haven't revised my old story much. You've added one thing which I didn't have — your situation in 1938, and we find that Dorcax replaced Haverhill instead of Stamphis replacing Waterloo. You'll pardon me, I hope, if I rather prefer Stamphis? As to Haverhill, that appears in both versions of my story, *Leapers*."

He nodded. "I know it does — I mean, I know it appears in the revised version; that's the story I read in your magazine. I haven't read the earlier one. And the next part of my story starts out pretty much the way you had it, too."

The waiter brought beer, and an assortment of especially interesting fauna in mini skirts or trousers started to go by, followed, of course, by some that would be of interest only to another elephant. My visitor agreed that the green noodles were excellent, took a couple of swallows of beer and looked thoughtful.

"I said the next part starts out just about the way you had it in *Highway*, but that's misleading. It's true that Harvey

mentioned that the swamp road was used quite a bit, and that I decided to drive down there that evening, since Arlene was going to a shower for one of the girls in town, but you didn't mention anything about Bert Toland."

"Bert Toland?" I chuckled. "No, you're right. I didn't. Nothing about him came through to me at the time."

"Bert lived out right just about across from where the swamp road started. Used to walk to town and back when he needed anything, even though it was two miles. Had a car, but only used it when he needed to pick up stuff too heavy to carry back.

"He was starting out just as I drove along and I asked him if he'd like a lift. To my surprise, he was in the mood for a ride. I told him where I was going."

"Bert knew about the story and filled me in with a lot of details that are interesting enough, but not too relevant except for one. He said he often sat out on his porch late at night, sometimes sat out for a whole evening, since mosquitoes didn't bother him at all. To look at him, you could suspect why. He was over seventy but as tough and well preserved as they ever come, and a mosquito would need a power drill to get anything out of him. Come to think of it, few of the natives minded mosquitoes.

"He'd sit there and watch the cars going in, because this was summer and there were plenty of nice spots about a mile or so in to pull over to the side and park. It was one of those things that everybody knew about, but the police didn't interfere with so long as there was no trouble, and there hadn't been any that summer, so far. But that isn't the relevant thing. Can you guess what it was?"

"Something he saw coming out one night?" I asked.

"Right. But nothing scary or unusual. Anyone who'd been sitting there with him at the time wouldn't have noticed anything strange at all. After that, he started watching for it, but it never happened again. My guess is that they were aware of making a mistake and were careful not to repeat it — not to let him see it again."

"You've forgotten to say what it was," I suggested.

"Oh — yes, of course. It seems that evening, when he went out

to sit on the porch and smoke his pipe and calculate, as he calls it — maybe with a jug beside him, but Bert wasn't the kind who got drunk — the wooden barriers just beyond the 'Road Closed' sign were still up. So was the chain. Well, you know, some young fellows found a way to fix that chain so it could be taken down and put back easily enough. It was as if they all had a common agreement. The first one in pushed back the barriers and took the chain down, and the last one out put everything back. Don't ask me how they worked it, but Bert said that once the chain was down after dusk it wasn't put back until after midnight, but it was always up and the barriers back, by one or two o'clock in the morning at the latest.

"Well, this night he counted the cars that went in. And then, before he went inside to bed, early in the morning — he counted them coming out."

"Aha! I have it, Holmes. More cars came out than went in!"

"Very good, Watson," Barlow replied. "That's just what it was. Two more, in fact, and they turned right, toward Dorcax, instead of left toward town. Besides, they were not open cars — that is, the windows weren't open or tops weren't down like the ones that smoochers were driving . . . Now I can start in on the part where you describe what I found out . . . No, hang it all, I forgot something really essential. Something else that Bert told me.

"Harvey's original three fools came back to town once or twice before the arrangement was concluded — it was handled by some firm in New York after that and they weren't seen again — and Bert overheard some snatches of conversation among them when they assumed that they were alone. He said there were two things that stuck in his mind. Something about 'raising the level' and something about 'around sixty years, soon enough.'" Couldn't figure out what it meant or why it seemed important, but he just had the feeling it *was* important."

"And you found out?"

"I have a feeling I did, Mr. Lowndes. But — corny as it sounds — there's one thing that I'd be willing to bet that you aren't going to believe. That can wait, though. Let's have another beer,

because this is going to disappoint you a bit; it's not quite the way you had it, though it starts out like that."

* * *

Even in the hushed glow of my dimmed lights, it was clear — now that I was looking for it — that the fool's highway was being used, as soon as I got there. The obstructions were there, but they weren't anywhere near as heavy as they looked. And the chain was down. Bert had said that it stretched between two trees on either side, just a few yards beyond the barrier. If I hadn't been looking for it, I wouldn't have noticed it piled up beside one of the trees.

So this was the fool's highway, the road to nowhere built by the men from nowhere, the road which came to a dead end fifteen miles out. This was the highway designed to give the impression that it had been unfinished, and was not for use.

After a half mile or so, I passed a parked car to one side, but that was the only one; it was still dusk. All was still for a few miles, then I began to notice the difference, the little indications that this was, indeed, not the innocent piece of rich man's folly that it seemed. Bert had said that no one ever went in more than a mile or so, and I wondered why someone hadn't, just out of curiosity, to see what it looked like at the end.

First of all, the texture was different; that was the very first thing. I'm no expert on road construction, but I've driven enough to know that different types of roads just feel different when you're driving over them. This one was beginning to feel resilient; my chevrolet seemed to leap ahead with little or no effort, and after a while, I shut off the motor to see if I'd coast. I did; I was coasting along perfectly fine on a road that was reasonably level, and for a much longer time than seemed right. And then the second thing started.

"It wasn't a feeling of fear, it wasn't a feeling of uneasiness, it wasn't a feeling of tiredness — I just began to wonder why I was taking the trouble. Why waste gas — well, I wasn't wasting gas; I was still coasting as if we were going down a gentle slope, belying entirely what I could see all around me — why waste time driving along a deserted road that doesn't lead anywhere? Bert Toland

could easily have dozed off sitting in the rocker on his porch with a jug by his side, and not seen a couple of the cars that went in that night. They could have come from Dorcax in the first place, so of course they'd turn that way when they came out.

Why find anything sinister about 'raising the level' or 'around sixty years, soon enough'? So they had a new process or whatever for making better roads. That would raise a lot of levels — standards of road construction — wouldn't it? And in sixty years or so, all roads would be made this way, because it would be cheaper by then and more efficient. Why keep coasting down this gentle hill when there was nothing to see on either side except the same sort of trees and woods you saw everywhere else? If I had Arlene with me, I could pull over to the side for a while. Why not go back and see if the hen party was over?

It was a gentle sort of suggestion, and it didn't grow stronger — it just persisted. There was nothing about it that would make me tell someone later about the strange and weird thing that happened when I was driving along this road. On the contrary, there was nothing unusual at all. The road was well built, and that was why it felt pleasant to ride along it. If I came over in daylight, I'd see that there was a gentle slope here so that I could coast a long way . . . If I ever felt it was worth the trouble to come back . . .

I almost did give in to it. I started the motor again, for the purpose of making a turn, then caught myself just in time. I'd been idling along at about fifteen miles an hour; instead of turning, I went up to twenty-five.

And not too much later, I figured that I ought to be coming toward the end of it. I put my lights on full, as it was getting dark, and I didn't want to run off the end into the swamp. There was a long straight stretch ahead of me; and in a moment or so, I saw two trees, larger and straighter than most of the others to the side with what looked like caution signals on them. I slowed down, and wasn't doing more than fifteen again as I went by them.

The change was as abrupt as a rough-cut closeup in an old movie. It just leaped up at me. One moment, I could see what

appeared to be the end of the fool's highway, and I was slowing down still more; the next moment, everything was gray — a grayness through which a few distant shapes were visible, but nothing else. I couldn't see the edges of the highway on either side of me; they ran into the grayness and were swallowed up by it. And it wasn't fog; I got the feeling that whatever it was, it didn't change. My first impression was that I'd never seen a gloomier looking scene.

The next impression was a feeling of weariness. I had spasms of yawning, and there was a very strong urge to stop, get out of the car and stretch. But at the same time, something seemed to warn me against getting out or even stopping. It was all I could do to keep from falling asleep at the wheel, and I was so intent on keeping her steady as she goes — somehow I knew I mustn't go off the road or get too close to what should have been its edges — that I completely overlooked something still more important.

Before I passed through those signal lights, I could see the end of the fool's highway in front of me — that is, I had the impression that it came to an end just a little beyond that point, so that my lights should have picked it up and made it definitely clear within a minute or so. But I'd traveled at least a mile since then, and there was every indication that no end of the road was in sight.

My thoughts were a jumble of discrete images which should fit together somehow it seemed, but remained separate: people from nowhere; Arlene; shadows that flickered and, Harvey elaborated this afternoon, seemed to have other shadows within them — shadows within the general outlines that weaved and moved about like tongues of fire; the publisher who never went out in bright sunlight; a level to be raised; more cars coming out than going in; what happened before 1938; a town that disappeared, to be replaced by another town; a long-term project covering half a century or more; the familiarity about everything in Dorcax . . .

My meditations were cut short as the car seemed to leap ahead, almost rearing up off the road, front wheels spinning in the air. I must have fallen asleep after all and pressed the accelerator down to the floor. But that was what saved me.

Before the weariness could carry me away again, I saw another pair of lights, seemingly caution signals, ahead. There was another jolt similar to the one at the first transition, and both the weariness and the gray were gone.

Bolt awake, I stared about me, mouth agape. This was no swamp, no gray wasteland, nor was it that strange facsimile that was Dorcax. I think I murmured something dramatic to myself, something like: "The road to nowhere leads — *outside!*"

* * *

"Now if you rewrite the story, the way I'm telling it," Barlow said as we put in the order for coffee and the special cheesecake, "you can just copy out the first few paragraphs the way you have them. I can't improve on that description."

* * *

I don't think it is possible to give a clear picture of what that "outside" beyond the end of the fool's highway was like, because I'm sure that no human being could see enough of it. Every second I was there, the hairs on my neck bristled and I felt something like a growl in my throat; everywhere I looked I knew there was more here than met my senses, and I was afraid of what was beyond my comprehension. Just because I couldn't see, hear, touch, taste, or smell it didn't mean that it couldn't hurt me.

The outstanding aspect was a *shifting*. Nothing seemed to be the same for any length of time. It was like the well-known optical illusion of the cubes. You look at them and, at first, it may appear that you are looking down at them; but for no reason at all, the perspective alters suddenly, and it seems you are looking at their under sides. That's a rough idea of how it was here.

There was color here — the general aspect of it was a sort of orange. But the sky was dotted with blank spots. Not black — just blank, sort of an underwater effect when there's nothing to see but water. I could sense motions at times, but they were vague, and I could never quite get distances. Things which seemed at first to be far away suddenly appeared close at hand, and that which was within grasp would apparently be flicked far

into the distance without any movement on its part. I could never be sure whether moving objects were coming or going.

You've read things about people having drug experiences which they said were completely indescribable — and then comes several thousand words of description. But I mean it; most of what I saw outside the building *was* indescribable. I think I saw beings. There was a sixth sense working in me, too. Call it perception. It's a kind of seeing without exactly seeing with the eyes, though sometimes the eyes confirm at least part of it — or one of the other so-called only five senses confirm it. It's closer to what you mean when you say, after trying to grasp an idea or something, "Oh — I see." I wouldn't call it extrasensory at all, because I think it *is* a sense which we all have, but hardly anyone develops.

So I perceived that there were beings of some kind moving around here, but the shapes didn't make much sense to me. Maybe I saw cross-sections or something like that. There was a story in one of those Avon Readers called *The Captured Cross Section*, by a Doctor Breuer. That reminded me a little of what I experienced. I think that is pretty close to the principle of it. Anyway, these beings were moving around me once in a while, but I never felt anything and none of them seemed to come close enough really to bother me.

After a while, I began to get the feeling that I'd seen enough and it was time to go back to my car. But there was also the feeling that this was something coming from outside, an influence. It was like the one I'd had before, gentle, but persistent. I came to a stop and looked all around.

There were buildings, and I can't describe them either except that they seemed to be tall and solid in one sense but just as I'd try to figure out what sort of shapes they were, they'd look different. I had the feeling that they weren't changing shape but that the light or whatever it was was shifting all the time, so that I was constantly getting a different angle on them.

There was one not far ahead of me, close enough so I could see what looked like some sort of opening or entrance. It seemed as if I could walk right in, and to cut it short, that is what I did. It

took some time, but it was all the same sort of thing, walking on a surface that felt solid but didn't always look that way. It wasn't exactly frightening, but very uneasy.

It seemed to be something like a museum . . . You know, I never thought of it then, but the only sound I heard the entire time I was there was my own voice. I felt lonely after a while, and started voicing my thoughts aloud because I wanted to hear something familiar — but it didn't occur to me then that I hadn't heard anything unfamiliar. I think I might have been panic-stricken if I had. When vision is unreliable, or you can't see at all, sounds can be terrifying.

Well, you described most of what I saw there, Mr. Lowndes, machinery or what looked like machinery, and books — a library of books which obviously came from Earth. And I saw models of human beings, men, women, and children of all races and kinds, and a model of Dorcax, right down to the last detail, it seemed, although I can't be sure of that; I hadn't examined Dorcax that closely.

But here's where your vision stopped short, and that's why I wanted to find you and tell you. There were other exhibits, like the ones you find in the Museum of Natural history — animals in their natural habitat sort of thing. Perhaps I should amend that. I *assume* there was more than one, although I didn't see more than one.

It was huge, and I couldn't see anything in it that looked as if it was a model or if any kind of painted backdrop took over. It was a landscape with ruins of buildings, though they were strange-looking buildings, sort of squat and all the doorways that were left were both too low and too wide for humans. There were jagged rocks, and what looked like the skeletons of trees. I had the feeling that it must be a night scene, although I couldn't see any stars or light in what looked to be the sky. But everything was phosphorescent. Everything glowed.

Remember, this was back in 1940. Phosphorescence was what an unscientific man like myself would think of when everything glowed in a sort of darkness. But that wasn't all of it.

There were lights moving around, and they were different sizes. After a while, I saw that some were on the ground and some in the air. And they had colors. I stood there and watched while some of them moved up from the ground, and after a while I could make out some still on the ground.

It was the most desolate scene I've ever seen — at first. But as I stood there, watching, more and more color seemed to open up, and it began to get beautiful. That's an awfully pale word for it. I began to get a joyful feeling from those lights. I had the feeling that they lived here and this was a wonderful place for them, a happy land. And I saw that they were not only on the ground, but on the rocks, on the skeletons of the trees, on the ruins of the buildings, too. And they were making patterns in the sky, and they were wonderful patterns. I began to feel a longing to join them, as if this was a kind of heaven. I didn't hear any music, but I got the feeling of music.

And then I perceived something. I could walk right in to that world if I wanted to. In fact, I started to, before I stopped myself. Yes, I said to myself, but I wasn't talking aloud now, yes, I could walk right in — but could I get back? Could the lights get out to where I was?

So I stayed and watched, and no child seeing a wonderful display of trains ever watched with more longing. But finally, I pulled myself away, and went back to the car. Going back was no trouble; I got there the same way I came. Nothing bothered me, nothing threatened me.

* * *

Barlow finished his coffee, and said, "Let's have another beer. Talking makes you thirsty, but I'm almost through."

"Did you tell Arlene about it?" I asked.

He shook his head. "No. And now we're coming to the part I don't expect you to believe. You know, I said something about checking up after we got back to New York, and finding out that according to Washington and all the latest almanacs and atlases and gazeteers that there was a town called Dorcax?"

I nodded. "Yes. So what did you do next?"

He put his coffee cup down and stared at me. "That's the

unbelievable part. Not just that I did nothing. *I forgot about it.* I mean really, fully, completely forgot. I had all that material, and it all just went out of my mind completely. If I heard the name 'Dorcax' or read about it, it meant nothing to me at all.

"I left that publisher in 1942 and went in the service. Arlene got a job that took her to London. I didn't see any action on the front, but I got around a bit. And then, in 1945, the first V rockets hit London. Arlene was in the wrong place at the wrong time."

"I'm sorry," I said.

"No need to fill you out on after 1945. When we gave up the apartment in New York, all my stuff was stored in a friend's attic in Connecticut. I finally decided to have a look through it just last month — and that was when it all came back. Suddenly I remembered everything."

The waiter brought our beer and I filled our glasses. "Well," I said, "that's not a bad story, Mr. Barlow. You've added some things, and I like them. I've thought of revising *Highway*, but I realized it couldn't be done. You see, as a story of something that *might* have happened in 1940 — but didn't — I'm vain enough to feel that it still reads fairly well. But it couldn't happen at the end of the 60's, not anything like the way it did there . . . Did you go back to Dorcax?"

He shook his head. "Dorcax is gone. I see now — it was only supposed to be temporary. The old town was restored, and all the records changed again."

"Including Washington's, of course."

"That would have to be," he said. "I can see you don't believe me even a little, but I'm not surprised and I'm not much hurt. I just wanted to tell you. Figured you'd listen, at least." He got up and put a large bill down on the table. "I have to go now, so you take care of the tip and what you do with any change is your business. Just one final thing.

"The reason I wanted to tell someone is that whatever it is, *it's started up again.* I'm not going to stretch your overworked credulity by saying where, but I've found out where. There's another road to nowhere, and I'm going to drive down it again.

"I can't forget that glowing world. I've got to take another look. Maybe I'll walk in to it. If I do, I don't suppose I'll come back and I doubt if I'll last very long, even if there's air I can breathe and food I can eat and water to drink. We have a different idea of what that glow means now, haven't we?"

I nodded.

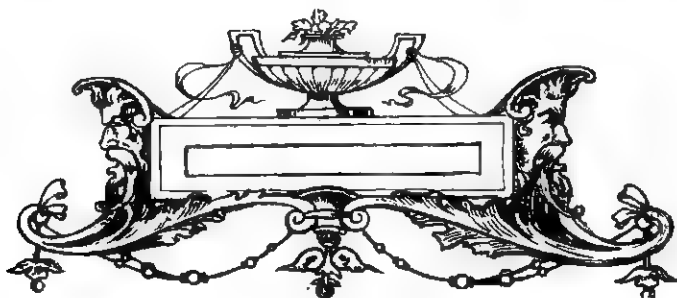
He held out his hand. "Thanks for listening. If I do come back, I'll look you up again."

* * *

Of course, there's no Dorcax in Maine now, and what is more there was never a Haverhill right across from New Hampshire. And I never heard from Richard Barlow again — it's been over a year.

That bit about "raising the level" and "fifty or sixty years" sounds somewhat interesting, if you consider just what levels have been raised since 1940 and are still being raised. So far as implications go, I find the ones that Barlow suggested somewhat more interesting than those in my own original version.

But just the same, I'm not sure I'd have revised my old story according to his contentions if it were not for one thing. He stood on the corner for a moment, waiting for the traffic light to change, when he left me. That was when the sun came out very brightly for a moment or two, and I saw his shadow.



It Is Written

What sort of story that we have been publishing in *MAGAZINE OF HORROR* has been most consistently popular with you, the active readers? Has there been sufficient agreement so that we can say any one type rates higher in your preference than another? This question came up a few days ago (I am writing this on November 19th, 1969) when I had lunch with Steffan B. Aletti. Mr. Aletti suggested that the more bloodily gruesome sort prevails with you; I replied that it might be a good idea to make a fresh survey. So let's start with a list of the stories that have come out in first place according to your votes, from the very first issue.

No. 1, August 1963: *The Man with a Thousand Legs*, by Frank Belknap Long; No. 2, November 1963: *Clarissa*, by Robert A. W. Lowndes; No. 3, February 1964: *The Seeds of Death*, by David H. Keller, M.D.; No. 4, May 1964: *The Dreams in the Witch-House*, by H. P. Lovecraft; No. 5, September 1964: *Cassius*, by the Rev. Henry S. Whitehead, tied with *The House of the Worm*, by Merle Prout; No. 6, November 1964: *Caverns of Horror*, by Laurence Manning.

No. 7, January 1965: *The Shuttered Room*, by August Derleth & H.P. Lovecraft; No. 8, April, 1965: *The Dead Who Walk*, by Ray Cummings; No. 9, *Skulls in the Stars*, by Robert E. Howard; No. 10, *The Cloth of Madness*, by Seabury Quinn; No. 11, November 1965: *The Devil's Pool*, by Grege la Spina; No. 12, Winter 1965/66: *The*

Black Beast, by the Rev. Henry S. Whitehead.

No. 13, Summer 1966: *Almost Immortal*, by Austin Hall; No. 14, Winter 1966/67: *The Monster-God of Mamurth*, by Edmond Hamilton; No. 15, Spring 1967: *Lilies*, by Robert A. W. Lowndes; No. 16, Summer, 1967: *The Dog That Laughed*, by Charles Willard Diffin; No. 17, Fall 1967: *"Williamson"*, by the Rev. Henry S. Whitehead; No. 18, November 1967: *In Amundsen's Tent*, by John Martin Leahy.

No. 19, January 1968: *The Last of Placide's Wife*, by Kirk Mashburn; No. 20, March 1968: *A Cry From Beyond*, by Victor Rousseau; No. 21, May 1968: *Kings of the Night*, by Robert E. Howard; No. 22, July 1968: *Worms of the Earth*, by Robert E. Howard; No. 23, September 1968: *The Abyss* (part one), by David H. Keller, M.D.; No. 24, November 1968: *The Eye of Horus*, by Steffan B. Aletti.

No. 25, January 1969: *The Colossus of Ylourgne*, by Clarke Ashton Smith; No. 26, March 1969: *The Devil's Bride* (part one), by Seabury Quinn; No. 27, May 1969: *The Last Work of Pietro of Apono*, by Steffan B. Aletti; No. 28, July 1969: *The Devil's Bride* (part three), by Seabury Quinn; No. 29, September 1969: *Guatemozin the Visitant*, by Arthur J. Burks.

The December (No. 30) issue was very late in appearing, and at this time I cannot tell you more than that Robert Bloch's *Satan's Servants* has taken an early lead.

Looking over the list of titles, you will see that Mr. Aletti's suggestion was not too far out; and I see that I misinterpreted it when he said it, for what I thought of was sensational, not particularly well written stories — pulp stories, in the least complimentary sense. Leaving my own two out of consideration, I should say that nearly all the remaining 27 are well above the general level of pulp writing in the '20s and '30s. There were indeed very excellently written stories published in some of the magazines of the period; but we must remember that there were many categories of pulp magazines, and numerous titles within each category; and the majority of these magazines, as a whole, were slanted toward the undiscriminating reader. Perhaps we tend to remember the few which differed, but this amounts to highly selective remembering, just as most of us who lived and purchased pulp magazines in those times were very selective in what we bought and read.

I would say that all 29 of the stories which came out first place in your estimation can rightly be called "bizarre" in the imaginative sense (as opposed to particularly sordid crimes which contain bizarre elements, like the hobby of Jack the Ripper); most of them present a distinct element of the gruesome; and if you suspend disbelief, nearly all can be considered frightening in one way or another.

In some instances, the winning story came out in front by a close margin. Let's go through the list again and note such stories, to see whether (if they had squeaked through at the last moment, as some of them might have done) their winning would alter this picture. This time I won't spell out the dates of the issues, but just the whole numbers. I shall list only such stories where the receipt of just *one* further ballot before

the polls were closed *could* have made the second place story the winner.

No. 1: *The Yellow Sign*, by Robert W. Chambers; No. 2, *The Space-Eaters*, by Frank Belknap Long; No. 4: *The Mark of the Beast*, by Rudyard Kipling (this would have made it a tie); No. 5 — another ballot could have broken the tie; No. 9, *The Whistling Room*, by William Hope Hodgson; No. 11, *Rattle of Bones*, by Robert E. Howard; No. 13, *Heredity* by David H. Keller, M.D. (this would have been a tie); No. 15, *The Vale of Lost Women*, by Robert E. Howard; No. 17, *The Curse of Amen-Ra*, by Victor Rousseau; No. 18, *Wolves of Darkness*, by Jack Williamson; No. 20, *Only Gone Before*, by Emil Petaja; No. 22, *A Physical Invasion* (part two), by Algernon Blackwood; No. 24, *Once in a Thousand Years*, by Frances Bragg Middleton, tied with *Four Prose-Poems*, by H.P. Lovecraft; No. 25, *There Shall be no Darkness*, by James Blish; No. 29, *The Case of the Sinister Shape*, by Gordon MacCreagh.

And at this moment, Lester del Rey's *Cross of Fire* is close enough to first place so that a single ballot could put it there.

You'll note in the above list that in certain instances, I've stated that a tie would result; that was the maximum. Of course, in any of these instances, a tie *could* have resulted, and with issue No. 24, we could have had a three-way tie for first place.

I think you will agree with me that had all of these second-place tales come out in first place, the over-all picture would not be substantially different. In some instances, it seems to me that the second place stories were more of the horror type than the first place tales — Dr. Keller's *Heredity*, for example, as opposed to Austin Hall's *Almost Immortal*, which was the winner for that issue — but I cheerfully acknowledge

that this is a subjective matter, and my opinion proves nothing.

Being a somewhat lazy person, I seldom do a thing for one reason when I can possibly do it for two or more. During the course of our conversation, Mr. Aletti lamented the fact that he delayed so long in sending in the ballot which could have put *There Shall be no Darkness* in to first place, as he regards this story by James Blish as the best we have yet published in *MAGAZINE OF HORROR*. For as it turned out, Mr. Aletti's ballot was a day late in arriving; later, the same week, several more ballots arrived, and had they all been

counted, the two stories would have shifted back to where they were when the polls were closed — still a squeaker! So, if upon reading over the list of almost-winners, you find some which you considered better than the story which won (or best in the issue), and this was a time when you could have voted early but did not, repent and change your ways! You've seen by the number of might-have-beens that close races happen often enough, and it can easily happen again.

I really can't settle upon a single story, myself, as the single best story (to

(turn to page 122)

Coming Next Issue

She took the bottle hesitantly, still a flicker of fear in her eyes. "Go ahead," I coaxed. "It won't hurt you. You want to be rid of these nightmares, don't you?"

She drank, and moments later slumped to the floor. I knelt beside her. Her breathing was deep at first; then it stopped suddenly; then continued at an accelerated rate. "Help me!" she cried. Her voice was no longer girlish, but carried the tones of a much more mature woman.

"Tell me who you are," I commanded.

"I am the Bride of the Wind," the woman's voice moaned.

I'd thought the girl's description of her nightmare sounded familiar. Now I recalled where I'd heard it. Long ago, there was in Germany a lady who was a very fine huntress and horsewoman. She would ride to her hunts, trampling over any farms, fields, and gardens that lay in her path. When she died, the Wind chose her as a wife, and now she was the hunted, chased by serpents and dragons.

"What do you want of me?" I asked.

"Help!" the voice screeched hoarsely.

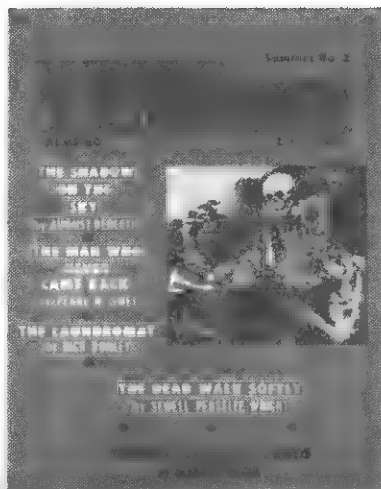
"How should I help you?"

"Release me from this horror. Let me rest my soul in peace."

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my own taste) which has appeared in MOH, but Mr. Aletti's nomination would certainly be on my list of the best ten. If you, the readers, would like to send me your list of best ten stories that appeared in our first 30 issues, making the December 1969 issue the cut-off point, I'll cheerfully join in with you and keep score. I have but one suggestion — but, of course, you are entirely free to ignore it!: rather than try to decide which ten are best from academic literary standards of excellence, choose the ten which you enjoyed reading the most, and perhaps taking in to account any which you may have found yourself re-reading one or more times. For if you are particularly aware of literary standards when you read, this is going to color your responses to the stories in retrospect.

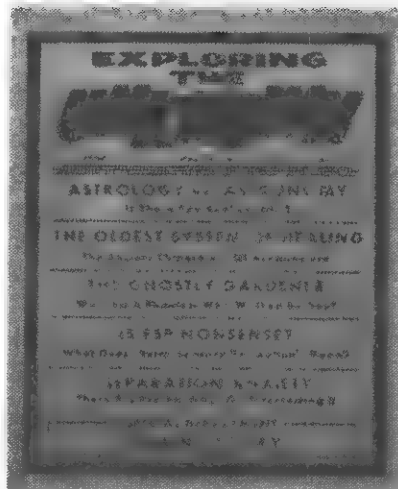
Incidentally, have you wondered which issue brought forth the largest number of ballots from the active readers? I did, and was astonished to find that issue No. 16, Summer 1967 has a substantial lead here. The astonishment comes from the fact that while I, myself, consider this a good issue, I still feel that a number of others were much better.

Since *Steffan B. Aletti* furnished the impetus to our preliminary remarks, we'll start off with his comments on the December issue (No. 30). He writes: "I enjoyed the Bloch, especially the inclusion of the Lovecraft notes and Bloch's commentary. The Roscoe struck me as a poor man's *The Devil and Daniel Webster*, with a number of similar incidents adding up to a very predictable conclusion, but still it is a good, sound piece.

"This was the first I've read of del Rey, though the name is very familiar. I liked the idea behind it very much, though that frenetic at-the-point-of-dissolution style, trailing off with dotdotdots between disconnected thoughts leaves me rather cold.

"I thought the Keller was the best of the series so far, though I still question their place in a book devoted to horror. The Wilson was amusing but unmemorable, and the Howard poem struck me as stiff and forced. I can't say that I've ever read a good horror poem, though I know poems that definitely evoke horror, but not of the supernatural type. I once set some George D. Painter to music, and the audience was appalled (at the words, not the music, though they loudly wondered at my taste in setting them). . . .

"I was also pleased at the two letters that mentioned me in MOH No. 30. Some of the letters in previous issues have been less than gracious (but I enjoy reading them all, anyway). Mr. D'Orsogna was especially kind, though I don't particularly consider myself as following in the vein of Lovecraft (at least he didn't say imitator). The 'Horrid Mnemabic Fragments' are, indeed my own invention, and my plan in mentioning them was to pave the way for a full-scale work around them. I was and am still undecided whether to work with a collection of short stories (as, for instance, the horror sections of Chambers' *The King in Yellow*), or to write a long work dealing with one specific set of characters and adventures. This indecision robbed me of the name of action, and I never got the show on the road. Should, however, the Finger of God descend on me one day, and give me the strength to deal with unfinished projects, 'The Mnemabic Fragments' will be in the top ten on the list, along with about 10 short stories, umpteen poems, another novel, a string quartet, several piano sonatas, and a book of photographs of NYC. When you have your fingers in too many pies, you accomplish zero. It's easy enough to do that in one field; work in three, and you triple your chances."



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It's all very well to say to an artist that one should finish what one starts, but a recent reading of Ernst Krause's biography of Richard Strauss reinforces my recollection of the facts about so many of the great composers, writers, etc.: some of their best-seeming and favorite projects somehow never got written. They were captivated by the notion, teased it, started work on it, — sometimes several times, discussed it, dreamed about it, perhaps prayed earnestly over it but the project never jelled. Or, even more melancholy, the work was apparently finished (as was the Sibelius 8th Symphony), but was finally burned as unsatisfactory. Some sort of inspirational Finger is decidedly needed at times; and until that time comes, it may be best to let a cherished project sleep as peacefully as possible with the other unborn. Crash programs of gestation just don't seem to work; and sometimes, as with the instance of one of Strauss' unborn, a good deal of the material dedicated to the project comes out naturally elsewhere.

I've wondered a good deal about the matter of horror poetry — that is, poems which can arouse a feeling of horror in the sense that a first class supernatural-type weird tale does. There was a time when some of Poe's and Lovecraft's poetry had this effect, but most of the verse published in *WEIRD TALES* (which used a sizeable amount, nearly always one or more in each issue) left me entirely unmoved. I thought Clark Ashton Smith's verses were very beautiful, but they didn't chill me in the slightest; and a few of the others were good mood pieces to my taste, or good swashbuckle of the Kipling sort — that would include most of the exhibits by Robert E. Howard and Henry Kuttner. Well, I still don't pretend to have solved the riddle, but here's a suggestion:

Except for the horror we might feel at descriptions of torture or mutilation, etc. (which would be no less gruesome in conventional fiction), nearly all of the supernatural type horror fiction requires an act of self mesmerization on the reader's part, these days. Hardly anyone who reads *Dracula* now believes that it is possible for a corpse to be animated by some sort of evil, to sustain this pseudo-life by drinking the blood of the living, to have super-hypnotic power, to be able to change into a bat or wolf or cloud of mist, etc. But absorbing the atmosphere which Stoker puts before me, the intricate details, I can visualize and pretend I believe while reading, and still get chills from the story. The mesmerization requires a more elaborate buildup than would be required for me to suspend disbelief in something I just did not know anything at all about, was not convinced of the impossibility that is (even though the conviction might be mistaken).

A poem dealing with the *Dracula* type of vampirism, however, is a compressed manipulation of symbols, among other things. This requires prior acceptance of the values to be attached to these symbols. If I believed in this kind of vampire, then a well-done poem dealing with vampires could chill me; but I require something more than this to submit to the necessary mesmerization.

Richard M. Hodgens writes: "I can not see how any reader of *MAGAZINE OF HORROR* could object to tales like Keller's 'From Cornwall' — although, of course, a reader might not like Keller's, in particular. I like them even better than his 'modern' stories on the whole, or so far . . . And I think *The Battle of the Toads* is the best. As you suggest, 'whimsy is supreme', but there is also a profound disquiet, if not horror. It is a perfectly-made tale, besides — and that may be more important than its

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elements. The series is remarkable, I see that one reader doubts that it is book-length. . . But then, I see it was announced for book publication (at \$3.00) in the late '40s. Imagine having to wait over twenty years to read it all — though few of us can have known what a good thing we were missing.

"I did not expect to like *Satan's Servants*, by Bloch, not even after I began reading it — but I did. For a few pages, one still expects it to be marred by the author's refusal, or inability, to take his assumption seriously. But Bloch manages this very well, with his impressive journey into the wilderness. Another common failing, in modern fantasy about witchcraft, is a tendency to take it too far from the historical subject. Lovecraft tried to fit witchcraft into something more ancient and evil — or dangerous, anyway. It didn't work, because witchcraft wasn't like that. Bloch does exaggerate the problem in New England, from the beginning, but he does not exaggerate too much, and has some persuasive lines — "... of graves that were not deep enough for their purpose and of graves that were far too deep ...". The *fantastic* exaggeration is isolated, at Roodsford, where the reader can accept it. Lovecraft's notes and comment on the story are most interesting. The Master's 'only criticism', 'Gideon's *excessively quick* discovery of the nature and horrors of Roodsford", is certainly an error; it would *not* have been 'much more powerful to have this revelation come with hideous *gradualness* after days of hellish suspicion.' Not unless Bloch altered the story after the criticism. The suspicion is there from the beginning, and the journey to Roodsford does what Lovecraft would have spent more days doing. My main criticism of the story would be simply that it is of a quite familiar sort, like *Cross of Fire*, unlike *The Battle of the Toads*.

"Theodore Roscoe's, *Speak for Yourself*, John Quincy, is unusual enough, but also rather long. I do not see how Roscoe could have managed the thing without all that biography and all that repetitious fiction, though.

This time, *The Editor's Page* is a bit too 'fair-minded' to be quite fair, on one point: 'There are extremists on both sides of the question . . .'. Maybe there are, but the extremists of the 'New Wave' are much more extreme — and obviously they went to extremes before anyone answered them. It's probably true that 'Actually, the worst enemies of the New Wave are those who loudly make absurd claims for its authors.' And it seems that the loudest, most absurd claimants *are* its authors."

Witchcraft is a much broader thing than the Judeo-Christian ecclesiastical viewpoint admits, so it would seem to me that HPL was perfectly within his rights in the aspects of it he concentrates upon in *The Dreams in the Witch-House*, and *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* — although the latter is somewhat more close to the conventional attitudes. But some approaches to witchcraft concentrate upon occult metaphysics which, gone into deeply enough, are disturbingly close to the metaphysics of some of the non-Euclidean geometries, etc.

During the times of Christendom when the Church was close to all-powerful, there was no such thing as considering the witch as other than a Satanist. But the two are not necessarily connected at all. Some present-day witches are Satanists while others are not; the non-Satanists practice their understanding of what they call the Old Religion (pre-Christian) and the magic they employ is white magic. You might argue that magic (like science) is neither white nor black (good nor evil) of itself, and I'm largely in agreement with this;

however, *some* magical experiments, like *some* scientific experiments require unkind negotiations with other people and unpleasant uses of their bodies. The white witch will have no part of such experimentation.

Very likely you have seen some writing on the New Wave that I have not, and vice versa. Lord knows, I haven't made any special efforts to obtain and read more than a fraction of it. But what has seemed most damaging to me, so far, has been the arrogant and pretentious claims of various critics that this is the only sort of science fiction ever written that is worth an intelligent reader's attention. You find this, I am told, among the academic group – which is not known for any knowledge of the subject at all, and that is why I use the labels "arrogant" and "pretentious". I don't count fan enthusiasm, however intemperate, as anything like the same thing; after all, I and innumerable others of us who were enthusiastic fans in the '20s and '30s were loudly making what amounted to very absurd claims for some of our favorites – and thus displaying our ignorance, just as some of the young enthusiasts are doing today. Looking back at it I both marvel and feel grateful for the tolerance shown us by some of the mature editors and writers of the day; and the best way I can say "thank you" to these gentlemen is to remember now what I was then – and pass on to others some measure of the consideration that was shown to me.

Just the same, I'm eagerly looking forward to the next New Wave, for when it comes some of the present enthusiasts will be making "conservative" noises about it, and that will be most amusing. It has happened to every other rebel generation, and it will happen to this one; the new rebels, whatever they are, will find *Bug Jack Barron* as quaint as the most extreme New Wavists of 1970 find *The Skylark of Space*.

Henry E. Sobieski writes: "*Satan's Servants*: The best of the stories; the horror and suspense were there – a good story. The title and author were familiar, and when the credit line was given by you, I remembered it and looked it up in my collection of Arkham House books.

"*Cross of Fire*: A good vampire story, one I had not read before.

"*The Battle of the Toads*: My opinion still stands – fairy tales, and they should not be in MOH; but the majority has spoken and I will abide by it.

"*Harry Protagonist, Undersec for Overpop*: I was undecided which was last, the Keller yarn or the Wilson story; however, the Wilson story was a little better than Dr. Keller's.

"*Speak for Yourself, John Quincy*: A good story, but it was more science fiction than horror, and the real suspense and most of the tension and apprehension in a horror story were missing. More horror stories in MOH, please."

You'll see more horror stories in MOH, of course; but I'm a little dazed at the thought that anyone could consider the Roscoe novelet as science fiction!

As this issue goes to press, I'm saddened to hear of the passing of Celia Keller, widow of the Good Doctor, David H. Keller, M.D. Mrs. Keller had yearned to see her husband's *Tales From Cornwall* in book form while she was still here, but that not being in the cards at the moment, was happy to see them in MOH, and pleased that most of the readers enjoyed them as she did.

And since the paragraph above was typed, two more have departed from us: Seabury Quinn passed on December 24, 1969; Evelyn del Rey, wife of Lester del Rey was killed in an auto accident at the end of January. We shall miss all three, and an appreciation of Mr. Quinn's long career will appear in our next issue.

RAWL

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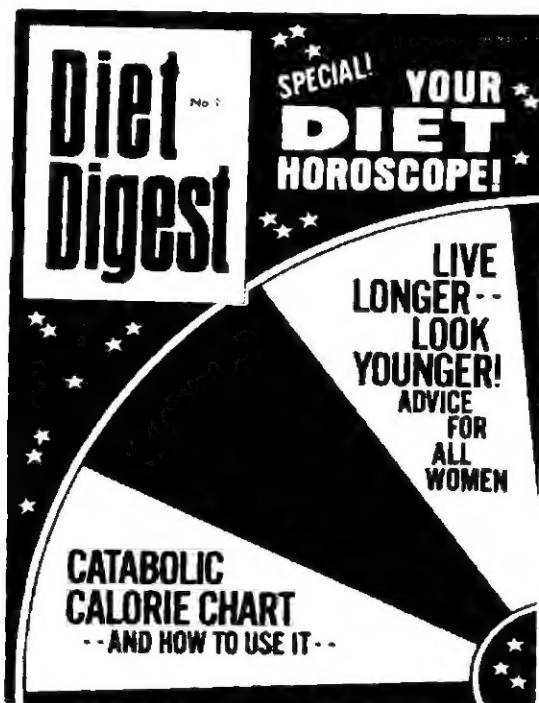
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